



THE APPLETON HOUSE, 54 BEACON STREET, BOSTON.

RECENT ARCHITECTURE IN AMERICA. V.

CITY DWELLINGS.

THE days are long since past when the temple or cathedral, the royal palace, the feudal castle, or the civic hall overshadowed the homes of men as the oak-tree overshadows the grasses of the field. The progress of modern civilization has meant the growing importance of the average individual, and this can nowhere more clearly be traced than in the history of architecture. It is true that even in our republican land the average does not mean the noblest, either among men or buildings. But it means that which is *collectively* most prominent. The general effect of a modern town depends less upon its monumental structures than upon the aggregate of its dwellings, humble in comparison though these individually may be. So there is no architectural branch in which success is more desirable than in the domestic branch. And there is none, perhaps, where it is so difficult of attainment. For here success can mean only a very *general* success—must mean that a hundred artists are working together without discord, and a thousand patrons are harmoniously minded.

It may seem at first sight an earnest of success that this branch should be more universally interesting than any other; that while the majority of men feel no responsibility for monumental undertakings, and care

so little for art as to be indifferent even in face of their results, every man has a home or hopes to have one; and that—if not for the love of art, then for some other equally potent though less admirable reason—he will wish his home to present a beautiful appearance. But, we must remember, almost all men think that here at least they are entitled to suggest how beauty should be wrought; and amateur ideas are apt to be all the more obstinate when very vague, all the more decided when very ignorant. And this will lead us to suspect that popular interest may, in fact, have tended to retard, not hasten, progress. And it will convince us, too, that in this branch especially we must be careful not to identify the architect too closely with his architecture, lest we should impute to him alone transgressions for which his patron has been in great part responsible.

It is not necessary for me to speak of the older domestic building of New York—Mr. White has described it so sympathetically in these same pages.* I will but pick up the story's thread where he let it drop,—in the neighborhood of Washington Square, and of the year 1840,—premising that I cannot hope in the strict sense to complete the tale of so delightful an historian.

More than fifty years ago the old Dutch

* See CENTURY MAGAZINE for October, 1883.

influence had ceased to reign alone. English examples had been widely followed, though never so as to subordinate those of New York's true mother-country. For example, prototypes of the "Colonnade" on Lafayette Place are to be found in London squares and "crescents," and English inspiration

frequent in our newer Western towns as is the high-stoop pattern.

In the neighborhood of Fourteenth street we come upon work of a later day, of that which as yet must be called our most characteristic epoch — work which was soon to give our city an individual aspect that it has not



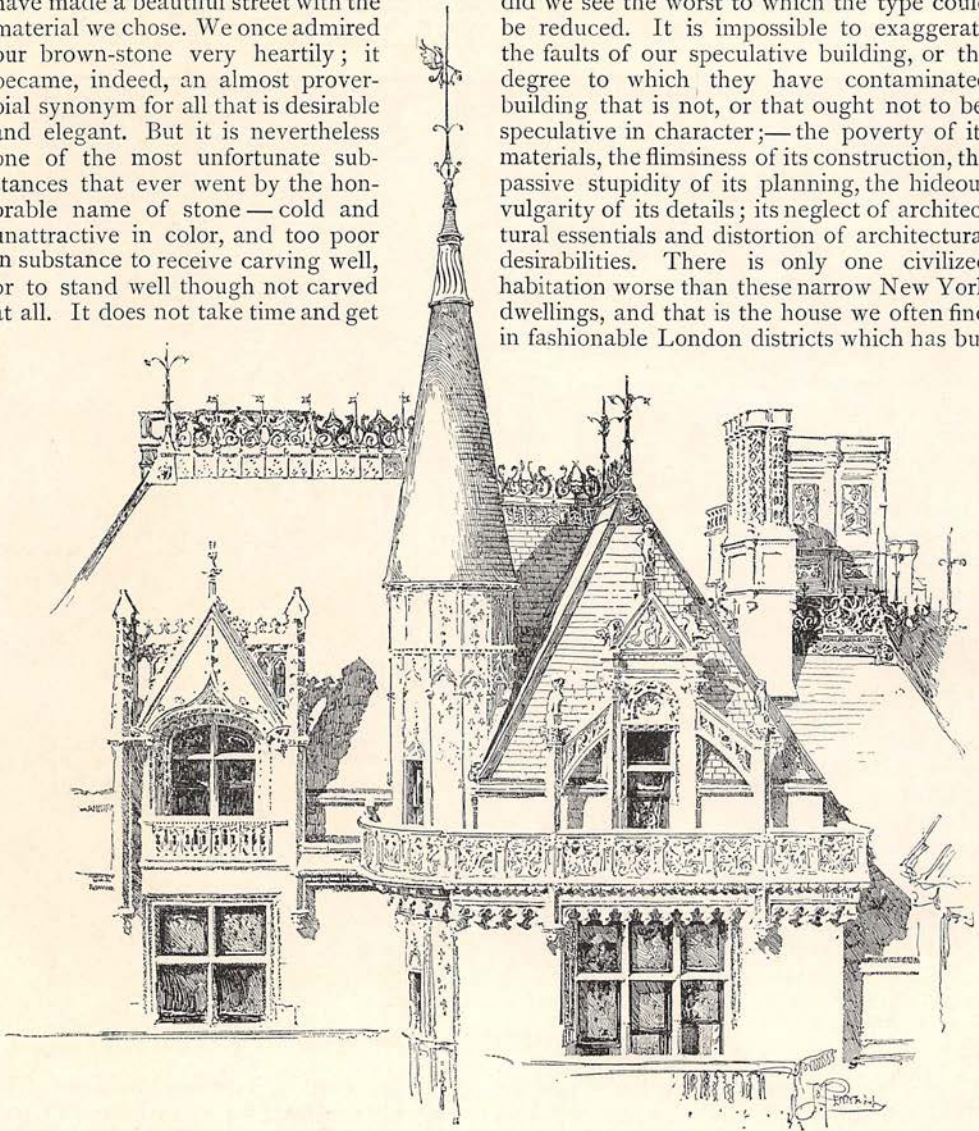
THE SOMERSET CLUB, BEACON STREET, BOSTON.

shows in those houses on the lower part of Fifth Avenue which by courtesy we call Gothic. But the most conspicuous importation from Britain was the house New Yorkers call the "English basement"—the house which has its entrance at the level of the street and its drawing-rooms upstairs, as distinguished from the Dutch type with its "high stoop" giving immediate access to the chief apartments. We have since built basement-houses in not inconsiderable numbers, but they have never been really popular in New York, and the demand for them seems to be waning now. Nor are they nearly as

wholly lost even in its newest portions. The "brown-stone front" was as barren of true architectural ideas as the older brick box, but it sought stateliness by the aid of pedimented windows, of columned porticoes, and of heavy overhanging cornices of—zinc. It is "a poor thing, but mine own," a style—or, much more properly, a *pattern*—that we did not borrow ready-made, but formed by retaining the Dutch high-stoop, joining it to a provincial translation of Italian Renaissance ornament, and executing the result in a local material. The type has spread far and wide—is visible even at the Golden Gate. But *we* are respon-

sible for its every appearance, and he is no true-souled New Yorker who does not feel a homesick thrill whenever in his Western travels he meets its ugly, stupid, but familiar face. Even if the pattern had been better, we could hardly have made a beautiful street with the material we chose. We once admired our brown-stone very heartily; it became, indeed, an almost proverbial synonym for all that is desirable and elegant. But it is nevertheless one of the most unfortunate substances that ever went by the honorable name of stone — cold and unattractive in color, and too poor in substance to receive carving well, or to stand well though not carved at all. It does not take time and get

tious nullity they have often the merit of a comfortable spaciousness; — not until the real-estate speculator began to raven in our midst, not until his ally, the cheap-building contractor, began to follow Mr. Thomas's lead, did we see the worst to which the type could be reduced. It is impossible to exaggerate the faults of our speculative building, or the degree to which they have contaminated building that is not, or that ought not to be, speculative in character; — the poverty of its materials, the flimsiness of its construction, the passive stupidity of its planning, the hideous vulgarity of its details; its neglect of architectural essentials and distortion of architectural desirabilities. There is only one civilized habitation worse than these narrow New York dwellings, and that is the house we often find in fashionable London districts which has but



WINDOW AND TOWER OF MR. W. K. VANDERBILT'S HOUSE, FIFTH AVENUE AND FIFTY-SECOND STREET, NEW YORK.

decently weather-worn; it simply cracks and splits and scales to pieces.*

Mr. Griffith Thomas was the most conspicuous among those who established this "New York vernacular." The brown-stone fronts he built are innumerable, and one scarcely differs from the other. But in spite of their preten-

one room on a floor, and out of that room a great corner cut to make place for the stairway. And there is, I may add, at least one material worse than our poorest brick or stone — the wretched kind of stucco that has been so generally used in London.

The old domestic architecture of Boston

* See, for instance, the stoop of the Manhattan Club-house on the south-west corner of Fifth Avenue and Fifteenth street. No stone worthy of the name should look like this — not though it had stood three hundred years instead of thirty.

and its neighborhood naturally followed English models. Very attractive are its relics—even more worthy, I think, of such a commentator as Mr. White than the old homes of New York. A good local feature was the bowed front, which gave a pleasant room within and supplied variety to the unornamented façade. A good example of such a Boston exterior is to be seen in our illustration of the Appleton house on Beacon street; a still better one in that of the Somers Club near by. This is finer, not only because a beautiful light-colored granite has been used, but because the proportions are more agreeable, and dignity is increased by its elevation above the street level. There is no better house than this in Boston, and it is peculiarly instructive as showing how beauty may result from almost unornamented construction. It is not an old house, either, but an exceptional example, dating from only some thirty years ago. It was built for a private residence, and, I believe, by a Frenchman, who must have been liberally minded, since he was inspired to work with variations after the good old local type rather than to import the manner of his own land.

In our dark ages Boston never did quite such dreadful things as New York. Or, at least, it never did so many of them—doubtless because it was not the scene of so much speculative work. Yet the Bostonians were pretty stupid too at times, as when they degraded their bowed front into a cramped angular bay, and repeated it along rows of narrow houses, thus producing an effect as of corrugated iron on a large scale.

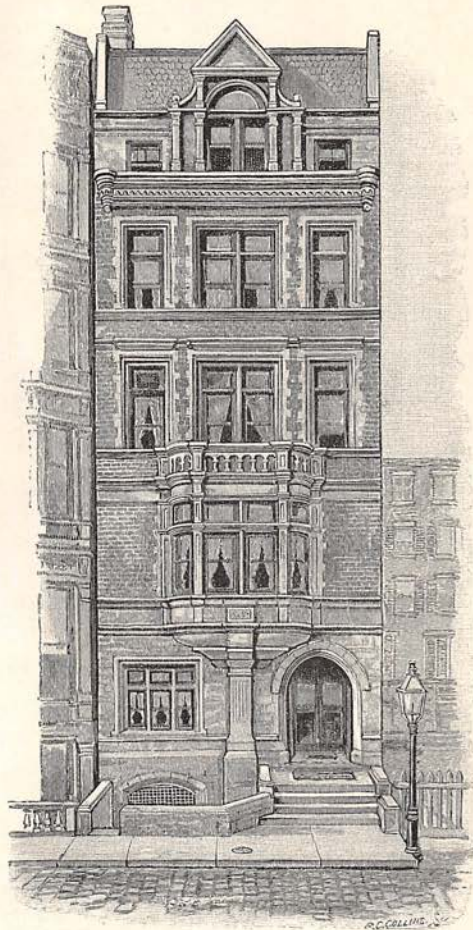
English parentage is, of course, apparent in Philadelphia too. The basement house is again the rule, though when small it is differently disposed inside. The New York high-stoop has been generally preferred in Washington, where, except in the suburbs, we find no houses that can be called old even in the limited American sense. Nothing could be more comfortable-looking than a few of the larger homes near Lafayette Square, nothing more ugly or mean than many streets where the ubiquity of the boarding-house seems only too well expressed.

Let us now look at some of our most recent dwellings, giving the first word to New York.

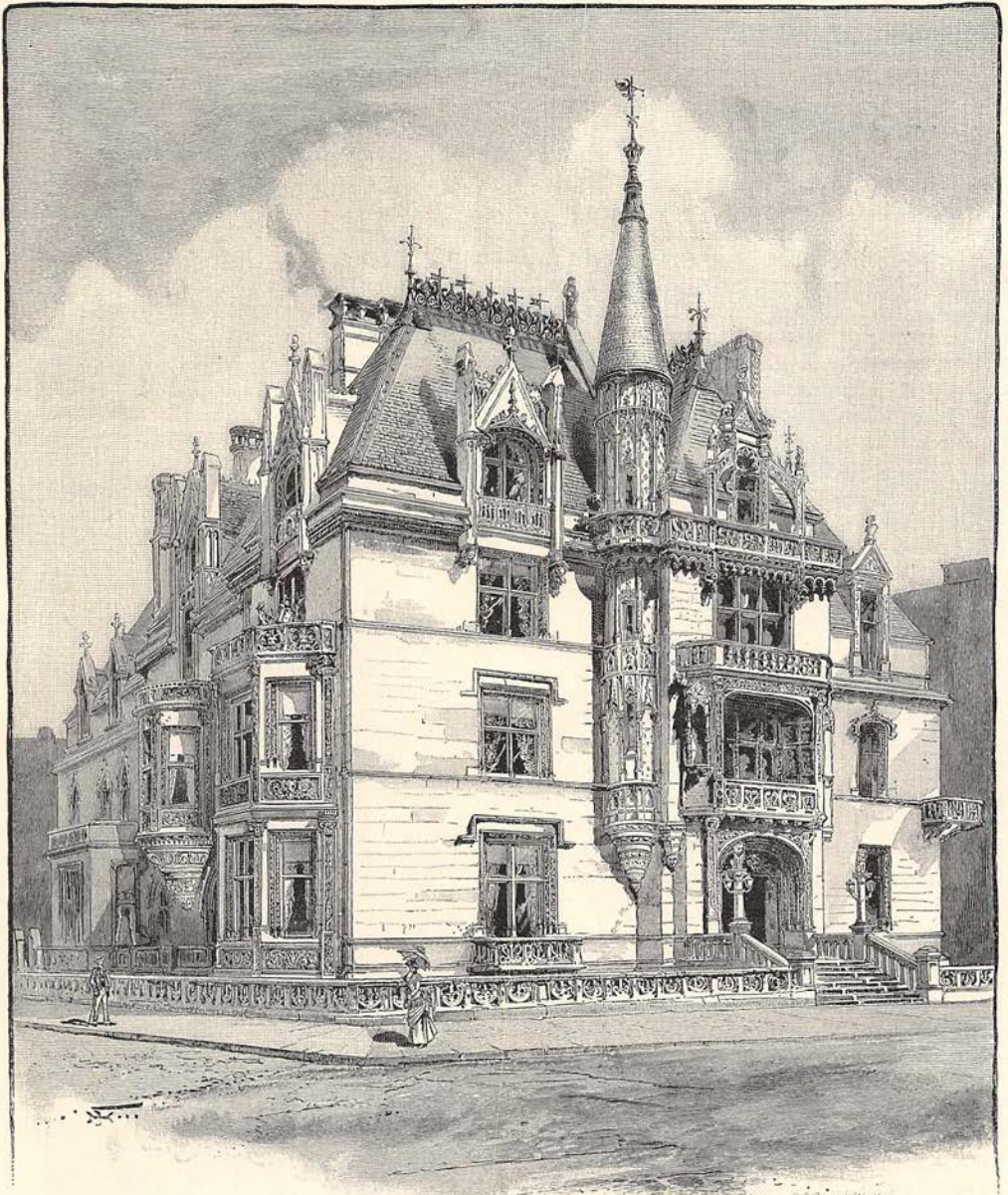
When our conventional pattern was broken in upon some fifteen years ago,—when we first began to look about for more varied materials, to try sometimes for at least partial isolation, and to remember that there were other available fashions besides the “vernacular,”—what was the immediate result? It was an increase of display, but not always an improvement in art. Indeed, we felt very

often that art must have been left entirely out of the calculation. We felt inclined to apply a quotation from the genial old chronicle of “Tom Jones,” which speaks of the buildings “with which some unknown hand hath adorned the rich clothing town, *where heaps of brick are piled up to show that heaps of money have been piled up before.*” The sin is, we see, no novel one; but it is a sin to blush for all the same. That is, unless its iniquity be purged by *art* in the result. In every land and in every age the love of display—the delight in spending money and in *proving* its expenditure—has been perhaps the mightiest motive force toward architectural creation. But the fact is masked, condoned, forgotten,—nay, approved,—when it is artistically expressed. Fortunately we too may already count dwellings not a few where evident costliness is amply justified by beauty.

The great marble house on the north-west corner of Fifth Avenue and Thirty-fourth



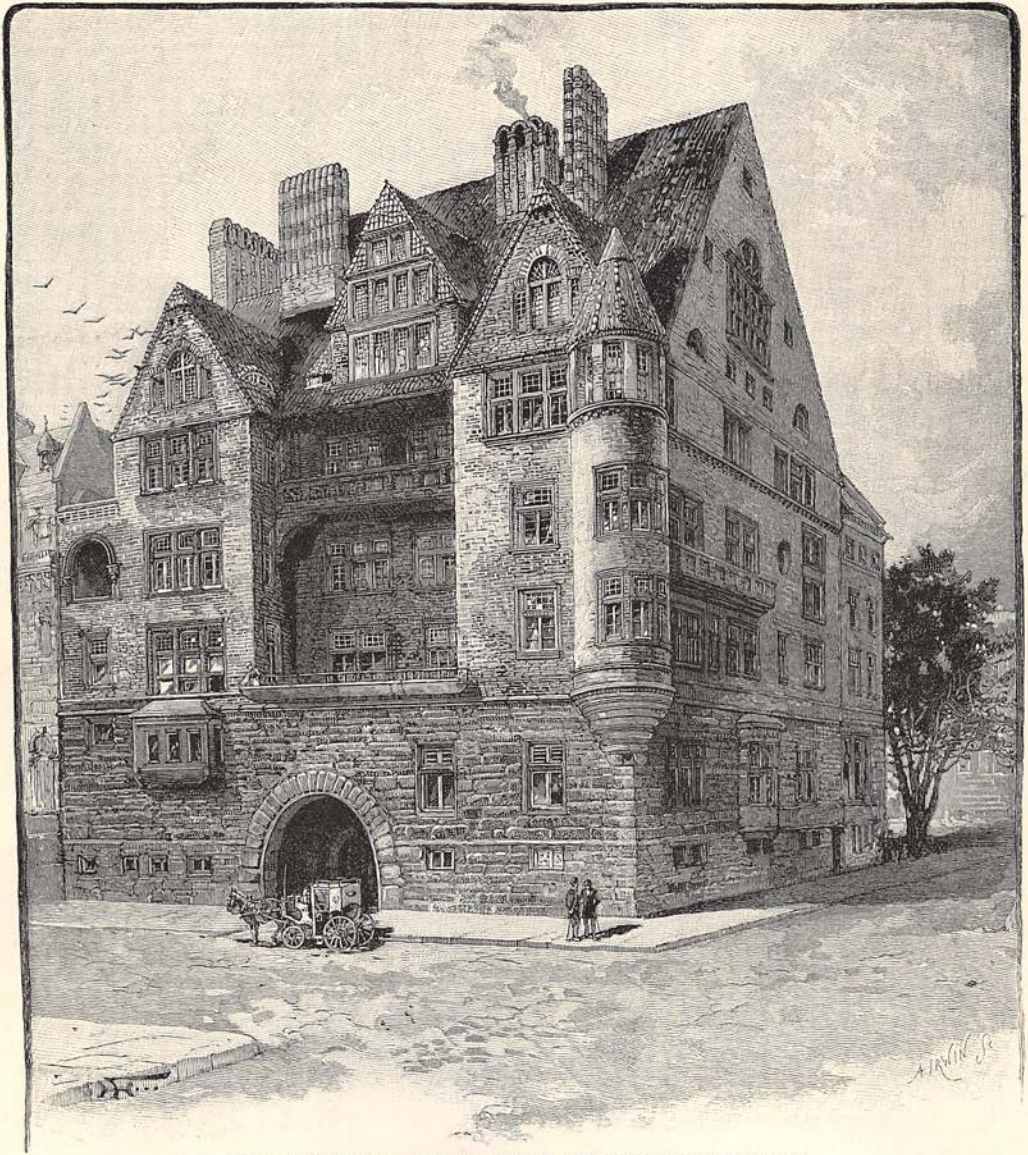
HOUSE OF MRS. CHARLES KNEELAND, 6 EAST FIFTY-FIFTH STREET.



MR. W. K. VANDERBILT'S HOUSE, FIFTY-SECOND STREET AND FIFTH AVENUE.

street was one of our earliest attempts at novelty, and in ambition it has certainly not since been surpassed. But it was not really a new departure—it was merely an effort to glorify the “vernacular” by increase of size, by isolation, and by change of material. In the last-named respect the effort was commendable. Under our bright sky and with our sootless atmosphere, white stone is very well in place and might much more often be employed. But not in just this fashion. For

here we have no good proportioning and no skillful composition either with masses or with features. Beauty has been sought only in the applied columnar decoration, and this is not architecturally valuable because it has been used without moderation, without care for contrast or relief or structural subordination, and without artistic knowledge in design or artistic grace in execution. We can only call it a very showy house, and add that to some eyes it may seem imposing—may seem to

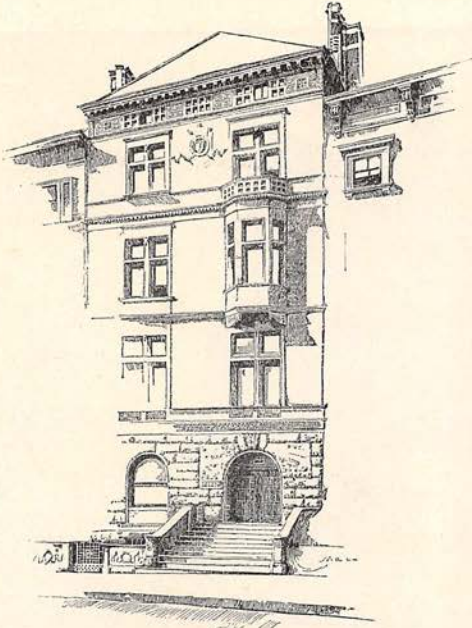


MR. TIFFANY'S HOUSE, MADISON AVENUE AND SEVENTY-SECOND STREET.

deserve the epithet "palatial," which epithet, I imagine, it was the first New York home to suggest to the reportorial pen.

But a little later we really did begin to build in more unfamiliar ways. "Queen Anne," for instance, became very popular. It has wrought some not unpleasing results, but has often been conspicuously misconceived and misapplied — as, for example, in the Union League Club-house, on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Fortieth street. Picturesqueness seems to have been the chief desire, and picturesqueness was an unworthy aim in a building of this size, in this position,

and devoted to this purpose. If it had really been secured, however, we should not grumble greatly. But we find instead a restlessness, a want of unity, an unmotivated variety, which strike us as irrational, and which are peculiarly unfortunate with features so large in scale. The great roof is simple and imposing, but the rest of the work cannot be said — either in general effect or in detail — to satisfy the mind or to please the eye. Is it a better building than, for instance, the Union Club at the corner of Twenty-first street, which is a good example of the "vernacular"? Hardly, I think, except as a sign of

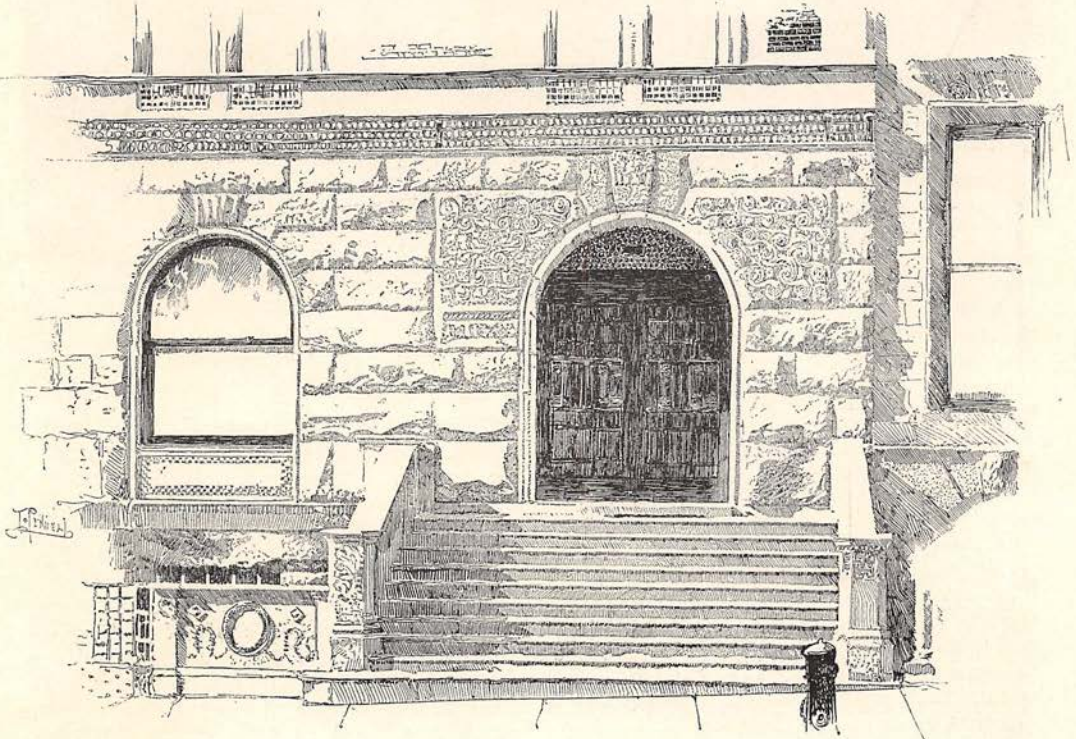


MR. J. COLEMAN DRAYTON'S HOUSE.

effort, a sign of commendable discontent with the old régime.

Pass now a little farther up the avenue, and we shall see the famous twin Vanderbilt

houses, where we have brown-stone again, though not of the old poor quality, and used in a very different manner. They are not ostentatious or vulgar or distressingly ugly houses, but neither are they really good or beautiful. In their quieter way they are great architectural sinners too. Stripped of their carving, they would be, as I have heard it expressed, merely "brown-stone packing-boxes." And their carving does not help them save to a superficial eye. We know that decoration is not *architectural* decoration unless it emphasizes construction. I may add that it is not architectural decoration unless it is *itself constructed*. Here neither requirement is fulfilled. The carving — one must not call it by any nobler name — is applied in just those places where it does not belong, and where it hurts, not helps, the structural expression. And it is not itself in any sense constructed. It consists simply of broad bands (of naturalistic foliage for the most part) which have no beginnings or endings, no moldings or framings, nothing to prove that they were designed for the rôle which they attempt, much less for the places that they fill. Their relief, moreover, is so low and uniform that they suffer doubly from want of proper setting, and utterly fail to perform not only the first purpose of ornament, structural emphasis, but the second

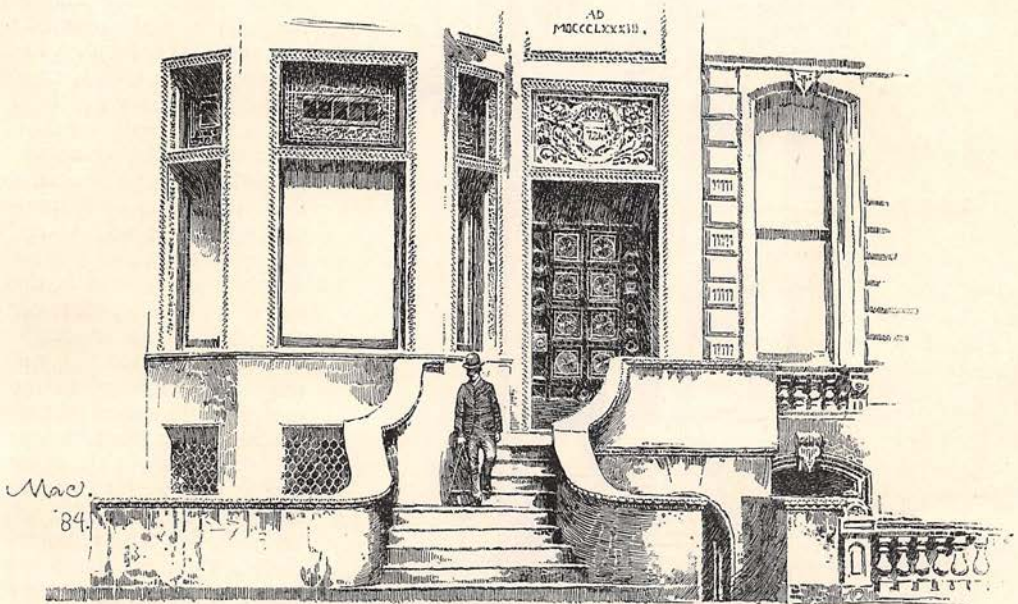


ENTRANCE TO MR. J. COLEMAN DRAYTON'S HOUSE.

also, the creation of effects of light and shadow. Abstractly considered, the carving is pretty enough in design and quite charming in execution; but in both respects it is carving such as a cabinet-maker might use in wood, not such as an architect should use in stone. And, I repeat, it is displayed for its own sake only. It is an interesting testimony to the fact that these dwellings were built, in truth, not by an architect, but by a clever decorator of interiors.

On the corner above we see another Vanderbilt house, built of light gray limestone,

the roof. We may feel, again, that since it is a city house its ornamentation is rather too profuse and delicate. But it is so skillfully applied and so charmingly executed, is so *architectural* in spite of its delicacy, that we have not the heart to wish it altered. Indeed, I think we may greatly rejoice in this sumptuous accumulation of beauty; for, while it is necessary that the virtues and possibilities of simplicity should be preached, it is well to be reminded occasionally that they are not the only virtues or the finest possibilities. It is well that we should see that the richest

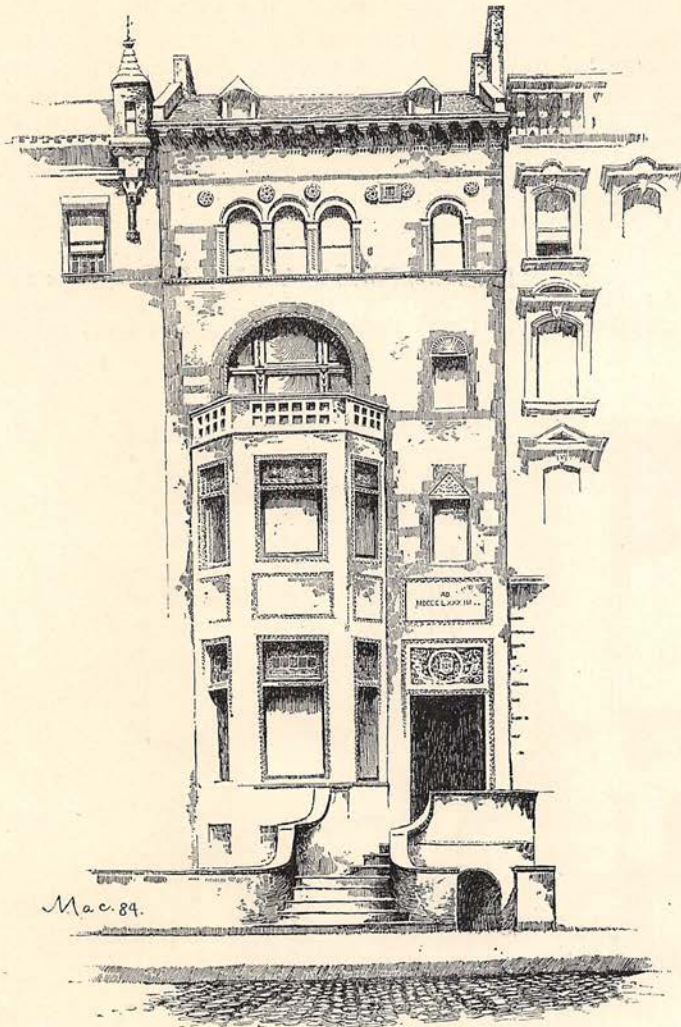


ENTRANCE TO MR. R. FULTON CUTTING'S HOUSE, 724 FIFTH AVENUE.

which is a house and not a carven chest. I think, too, that it is the most beautiful house in New York. Mr. Hunt has long stood at the head of his profession in America, his preëminence acknowledged not only by ourselves, but by the Frenchmen who elected him one of the seven foreign members of their Academy. So long had we known his learning, his taste, and his ability, that it was an oft-mentioned subject of regret that he should have found no favorable opportunity to show what his idea of a city home would be. So we are all the more thankful that it should have come to him at last. We may pick little faults in his building if we will. We may say — and the more we admire it the more apt we are to say, I think — that it would be better as a country than as a city house. We may think, too, that it has an overabundance of features; yet unity of effect has not been sacrificed to them — unless, perhaps, in the treatment of

elaboration need not be ostentatious, much less vulgar; that lavish art may be as refined as modest art; that excess means *wrong* work, not always *much* work. I am sure the most captious critic cannot deny that Mr. Hunt has carried out a very ambitious and elaborate design in a very successful way — in a way that is marvelously successful considering what the level of our art has been. If we examine his decoration closely, moreover, we shall see how great an improvement we have made in manual skill. What would have been the use had Mr. Hunt designed such work even a dozen years ago? Can we think with tolerance of how it would then have been translated into stone?

There are many large houses a little farther up the avenue which have the advantage of comparative isolation, or at least of a corner site. Where all are very ambitious, it is much to say that some — not all — are good; as,



HOUSE OF MR. R. FULTON CUTTING, 724 FIFTH AVENUE.

for instance, the one that Mr. Harney has built on the south-west corner of Fifty-seventh street. The old brown-stone front is prominent still in less conspicuous residences, but "Queen Anne" and French Renaissance fashions crowd it close.

Two houses of brick and stone on the lower corner of Fifth Avenue and Sixty-third street seem to me to merit mention, as does also Messrs. McKim, Mead and White's light-brick house near Seventy-fifth street, which, with its doubly bowed front, recalls the old Boston type. And then, if we turn into Madison Avenue, we shall see on the corner of Seventy-second street another and a very different work by the same hands.

It is a huge house extending a hundred feet on either street and holding three homes, which are disposed neither in flats nor in ver-

tical sections, but which (being intended for members of the same family) share the various floors between them in a more irregular way. Below, the structure is of rock-faced blue-stone, and is pierced with a broad, low archway leading to an interior court; above, we find the beautiful and novel brick-work to which I have already referred in an earlier chapter, harmonizing well with the ruggedly treated basement; and the great steep roof is of very dark-toned tiles. There is scarcely anything that can be called detail, the windows being simply framed in molded brick, and the stone being quite innocent of the chisel. I need not enumerate the various features upon which the effect wholly depends, for they are at least suggested in the illustration. I will only call attention to the design of the upper portion of the main front, where one side balances the other sufficiently well to secure harmony and avoid restlessness, but where, nevertheless, there is enough variation to obviate monotony and produce an allowable, desirable, moderate degree of picturesqueness; and add that if we examine the dif-

ferent features with the key afforded by interior necessity, we find them dictated by common sense, and not by fantasy. For example, the whole upper floor immediately beneath the roof is an enormous studio; and this explains not only the prominence of the roof itself, but also the great dormer with its many lights, which might seem "willful" did they illuminate an attic merely. In color I think the building very successful — alike in the blue and brown tones of its stone, in the yellow and brown gradations of its brick-work, in the rich duskiness of its tiling, and in the harmonious way these all work in together. Nor must we fail to mark how very quiet the color is, for it is well to know that architectural color worthy of the name may be attained without vivid tints or pronounced oppositions.

To me this is a very beautiful house as well

as a very good one. But I know there are many eyes which, while acknowledging its excellence as a piece of construction and an architectural design (as to this there can hardly be serious question), find it too uncompromisingly massive, too grave and somber, too forbidding, almost, to fit in with the idea of what is beautiful in domestic building. I can but reiterate that I myself do not feel thus about it, and then explain why, whether it be very beautiful or not, it seems to me the most interesting and most promising house we have yet constructed—more interesting even and much more promising than Mr. Hunt's indisputably beautiful French chateau. This is because when we come into its presence we do not for a moment think of asking what "style" it follows, or care a whit whether it follows none or draws inspirations from a dozen. Style it has—that style which means harmony of proportions, accord of features, unity of effect; which means that the artist has had a definite, homogeneous conception to express, and has expressed it clearly, coherently, and in each and every proportion, form, and detail. But it is a style of its own—one which must be judged by intrinsic standards, and not by reference to bygone fashions and antiquarian dogmas. For this reason I believe it must have a good influence upon our art; not as inciting to direct imitation,—that would perhaps be a dangerous essay,—but as showing that it is possible to be "original" without being fantastic or unscholarly (no work is unscholarly which is perfectly coherent and harmonious), and to build admirably without a particle of ornamentation. Nothing could be more instructive than to compare (or, rather, to *contrast*) the two finest houses New York has yet to show—this house and Mr. Hunt's. They prove how wide are the limits that bound architectural excellence even in the one branch of city domestic work; how foolish it is to try and fetter effort with narrow artistic creeds, with rigid dogmas as to style and treatment and amount of decoration. Each is an admirable house in its own way—I am almost afraid to say how admirable in my eyes when judged by the standard of current performance even in its better phases, and even in Europe as well as here. Yet no two houses could well be more unlike in idea, in material, in treatment, or in degree of ornamentation.

Continue down Madison Avenue now, and at the corner of Sixty-seventh street we shall find three houses built by Mr. Hunt—again in a rich and charming French transitional style. Here, too, we see the *artist*, and in work that has much beauty. Yet certain parts of it are, I think, inferior to the rest. The

Madison Avenue side contents us thoroughly as a piece of composition, the Sixty-seventh street side less entirely; and the corner, which should have been the strongest, is the weakest portion of the whole.

Farther on, just back of the cathedral, we find Messrs. McKim, Mead and White once more. The whole block is occupied by four houses treated as a single composition. In happy variation on our usual arrangement, the central ones are thrown far back, giving space for a turfed court with a fountain in the middle, while the others form projecting wings on either hand. The southerly wing contains Mr. Villard's house, so justly famed for its interior beauty. The external treatment is throughout very simple, after an Italian Renaissance fashion which wins a local flavor from the use of "brown-stone,"—better, however, than the average, both in quality and in color. The broad plain walls and regularly spaced and delicately ornamented windows are enlivened by the introduction of a *loggia* in the central portion, and are *composed*, moreover, by intelligent proportioning. The effect is very quiet, a little cold, perhaps a little tame; but it is extremely refined, and affords an interesting contrast to the effect of those "vernacular" examples whose inspiration was drawn from similar sources. Perhaps a careless eye will not see at first all the difference between the two; but it is there, both in structure and in decoration,—all the difference that marks off art from no art. As in their great house just described, so here as well, though in a very different language, these artists seem to be protesting against frivolity, tawdriness, unrest, and ostentation.

These have all been exceptional houses as to situation, or, at least, as to size. Individually they are, of course, more interesting than their humbler neighbors. But collectively considered, our average homes are the most important and should be most carefully studied. If *they* cannot be made good, then our city will never really be redeemed from the reproach of its ugly monotony.

The old average house is an unsuccessful thing indeed. In fact, it is not a *thing* at all, for a thing, at least in architecture, means an organism, and this house is merely a mechanical accumulation of spaces and openings, unbeautiful in themselves and uncombined with one another. For too long a time we apathetically excused it as the result of unalterable and unfortunate conditions. What could we do with a façade that was sixty feet or more in height and but twenty-five feet—as often, indeed, but twenty or even less—in width? We might have answered *much* if we had cared to use, not even our imagination,

but our memory merely. For the same problem had been at least agreeably treated in almost every foreign town. The "obelisque style" of house, as Balzac calls it, was characteristic of the old Paris that he loved. It was very lofty, often only three windows in width, and commonly built of but humble materials. Yet it was an organic structure and a picturesque. It was not a lifeless screen like ours. And similar houses in countless European streets have such charming fronts that they find illustration in every architectural hand-book.

Nor was another familiar plaint any more reasonable than this. It was very untrue that we could not light our houses better and yet give sufficient solidity of effect. I think the open, late-gothic façades of Venice look strong enough; and I know of many an old German house-front which is almost all windows, yet which looks delightfully secure,—as, for instance, the beautiful Leibnitz house in Hanover, pictured in Lübke's "History of Architecture."*

It has often been said, again, that New York building was bad chiefly because it showed no roofs. Surely there has often enough been good street architecture without visible roofs, and surely there is no possible reason why we might not have had as many roofs and gables and dormers and chimneys as heart could wish. They already exist to-day on most of the large houses I have named, and we find them modestly apparent in the three narrower façades that are among our illustrations.

I have heard Mr. Haight's basement house on East Fifty-fifth street described as "Queen Anne." If the reader cares to see how widely

things may differ that are called by this one name, he has only to contrast it with a group of four houses—not by Mr. Haight—at Fifth Avenue and Sixty-seventh street. These were built at the same time and by the same hands, yet each is as different as possible from its neighbors, and each is as distastefully fantastic as a house well could be.

Messrs. McKim, Mead and White's two houses on Fifth Avenue show varying adaptations of a delicate early Renaissance style that has refinement as its very essence. These three dwellings, together with others not a few, prove that composition *is* possible even with our average proportions. They prove, too, that composition does not mean a multitude of features—an idea that has too often found expression since we began to have ideas at all. There are scores and scores of houses in our up-town streets which have tried to be more "architectural" than the brown-stone front, but which show almost less of definite conception on their designers' part and visibly less of unity in their results—which are mere medleys of as many alien "things" as could be crowded into the given surface. There are but few "things" in our illustrated examples, but these few express structure and are combined with one another. Neither of them, perhaps, can we call quite perfect; yet we should be glad enough if all our houses were as good. And we should hardly complain if none of them were less attractive than a still simpler work of Messrs. McKim, Mead and White's—the Mercantile Library office on Fifth Avenue near Thirty-eighth street.

* I may note in passing the house fronts of Dantzig, which have been illustrated in various publications, and which might furnish our architects with peculiarly helpful suggestions. They are wonderfully varied and

charming, and they are lofty, narrow, and almost made up of windows. And, moreover, they reveal the Dutch high stoop, modified in the most sensible and attractive ways.

M. G. van Rensselaer.

FOR OTHERS.

WEeping for another's woe,
Tears flow then that would not flow
When our sorrow was our own,
And the deadly, stiffening blow
Was upon our own heart given
In the moments that have flown!

Cringing at another's cry
In the hollow world of grief,
Stills the anguish of our pain
For the fate that made us die
To our hopes as sweet as vain;
And our tears can flow again!

One storm blows the night this way,
But another brings the day.

Rose Hawthorne Lathrop.

RECENT ARCHITECTURE IN AMERICA. VI.

CITY DWELLINGS. II.



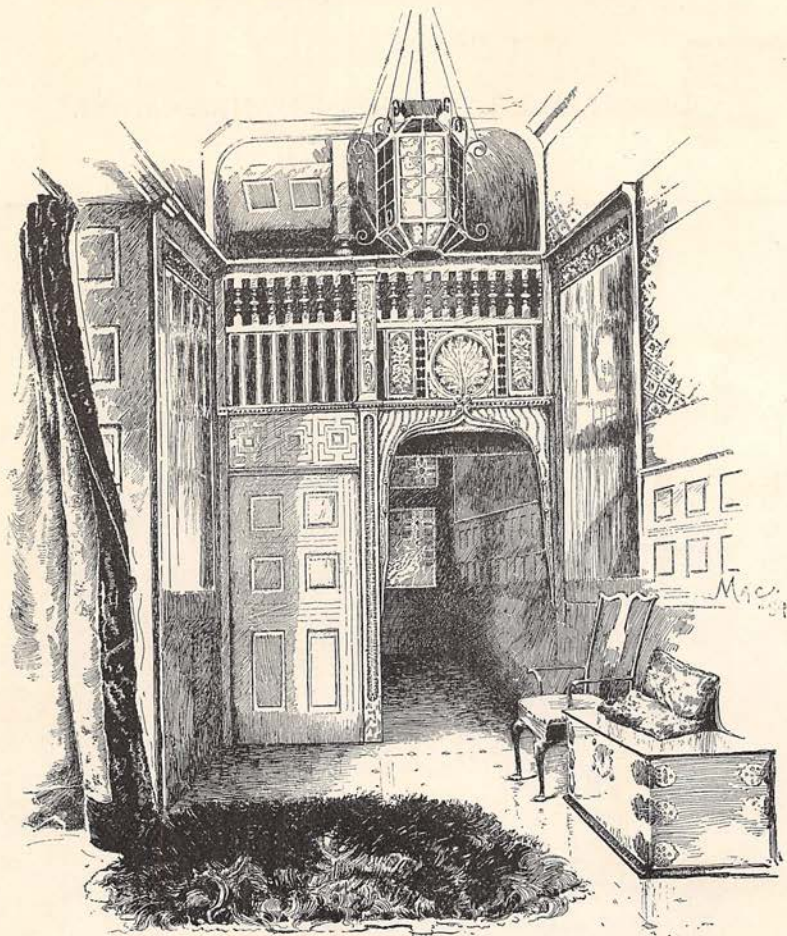
HOUSES OF F. L. HIGGINSON AND C. A. WHITTIER, BEACON STREET, BOSTON.

IN my last chapter, after referring to a few of the most conspicuous among the new homes of New York, I had but brief space left in which to say that even our average homes are also beginning to show marked improvement.

In nothing is this improvement more apparent than in the effort that is being made to use good and varied materials, and to treat each of them so as to reveal and to accentuate its best possibilities. We are at last trying to shake ourselves free from the monotonous tyranny of mechanically "pointed" red brick and mechanically smoothed and devitalized brown-stone. We handle our surfaces more vivaciously, and we proportion our units more artistically. It is not wonderful

that in the first reaction against lifeless nullity we should have run a little to the opposite extreme of over-ruggedness and over-emphasis, not only, as I have already said, in our monumental work, but also in our domestic. Spirit and vigor exist, for instance, in the basement of the house on Fifth Avenue near Thirty-fifth street; * but they have been achieved in a rather too impetuous fashion. The stones are perhaps too large to be "in scale" with the general proportions; and they are certainly too rudely wrought to be in keeping with the quiet refinement secured in other parts, or with the delicate nature of the decoration. Compare this basement with that of the Columbia Bank, already once cited as a model, and we see a distinct progress in

* Here, as elsewhere further on, I am obliged to refer to illustrations that were given with the preceding paper.



MR. J. J. HIGGINSON'S HALL, 16 EAST FORTY-FIRST STREET.

work that has come at short intervals from the same office.

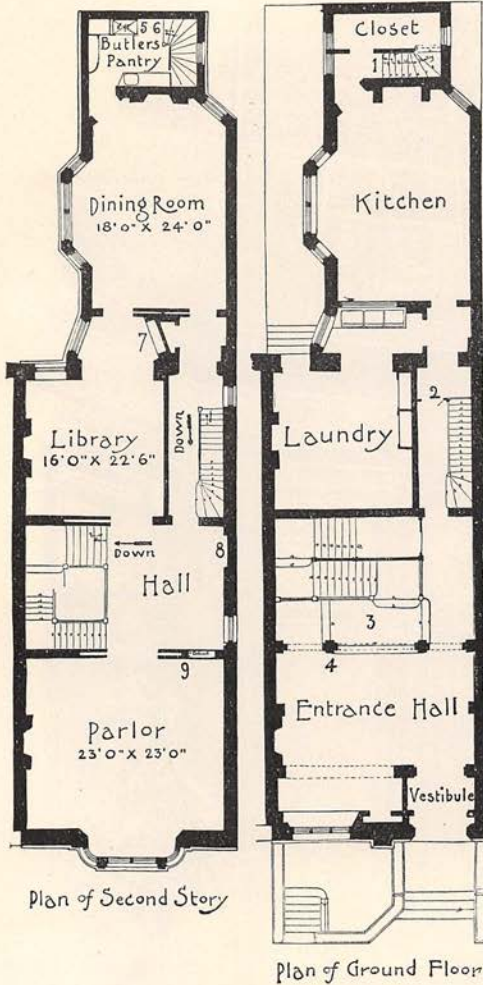
Our newest houses prove, no less, that we are beginning to do something better with our beloved high stoop than send it up straight and steep and narrow to the door. Some of the entrances on Fifty-seventh street are interesting examples; there is a good one on Madison Avenue not far below the railway station; and there are others in certain recently remodeled façades in the lower portion of Fifth Avenue.

Again, we find cheering promise in our decoration. Look at the ornament of No. 724 Fifth Avenue, and see how artistic it is. If anything, it is too delicate, too quiet, too refined. But these are the best of faults; and they would be even if their opposites had not so long been our crying sins.

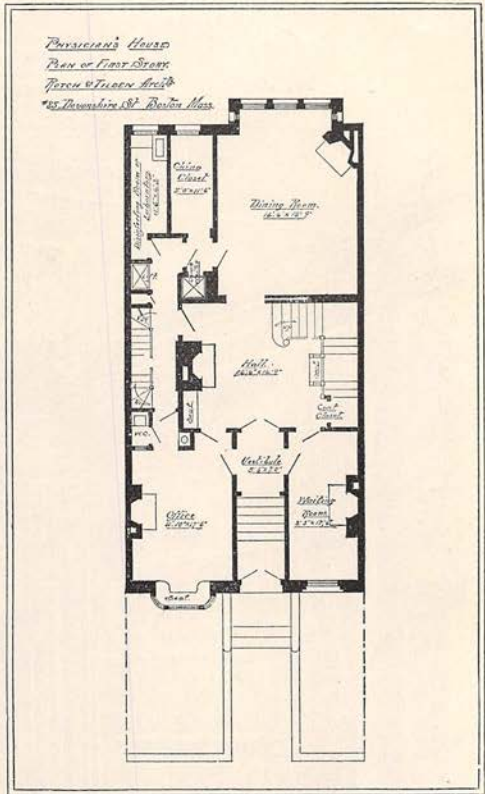
Boston too has grown ambitious of late years, and now shows many varieties of conspicuous good and bad. The bad need not detain us, yet even thus we shall have but

little space to note the good. The New York high stoop is becoming almost as frequent as the local type, and is often combined, more or less successfully, with the bowed front. Boston architects are fortunate in their beautiful red Longmeadow stone, and diligent in their efforts to make the most of it, both by itself and in combination with brick. Here as well as in New York the first revolt against mechanical smoothness led to the use of units too large in size and too unrefined in finish. There is a certain brutality of effect about many houses in the new "Back Bay" streets that springs from no defect but this. But here too there has been great improvement very lately—as, for example, in some houses on Commonwealth Avenue built by Messrs. Rotch & Tilden, where we see units which are suitable in size, and which in their finish hold the proper middle-ground between insignificance and rudeness.

Messrs. Sturgis & Brigham and Messrs. Peabody & Stearns should be cited for their



PLAN OF MR. CHARLES KNEELAND'S HOUSE,
EAST FIFTY-FIFTH STREET.



PLAN OF DR. ROTCH'S HOUSE, COMMONWEALTH AVENUE,
BOSTON.

numerous attractive façades in which successful efforts after a sensible novelty in design reveal themselves. A type, for example, which we already see quite often has a bowed front running up through two or threestories and surmounted then by a deeply recessed *loggia*, agreeable to use and most effective in its powerful shadow.

In other new dwellings we find a return to last century models — colonial or English — which savors almost too strongly of direct imitation. The colonial type is excellent as a point of departure rather than as a pattern to be copied literally. Our ideas, our tastes, our habits of living, *ourselves* — all have changed very greatly in the hundred years. And something of our wider views of life and art, of our more conscious desire for beauty and brightness, of our gayer, livelier — and more sophisticated — way of living, needs to be expressed in our domestic architecture.

If we wish to see perhaps the very simplest good houses that have been built in Boston, we may look at a group in red brick erected by Mr. Emerson on Huntington Avenue, near Trinity Church and the Art Museum. And then, to take a very wide step and reach the other extreme, we may turn to the two great houses on Beacon street that are illustrated here — the one to our left being Mr. Richardson's, the other Messrs. McKim, Mead & White's. They differ greatly in style and treatment, but each has considered the other in its own growth, and consequently is helped, not hurt, by the presence of its neighbor. Mr. Richardson's is the more striking of the two, and there is always a fervor about his work that seduces the would-be critic. But it has been called a trifle too "medieval" in its massiveness and in the element of grotesqueness introduced into its ornamentation. Perhaps it is true that the expression of the other is better suited to a modern home — to the voicing of that modern life whose ideal is elegance rather than physical force. So charming a house is it, indeed, that one longs to give it unstinted praise. And one might if only the porch

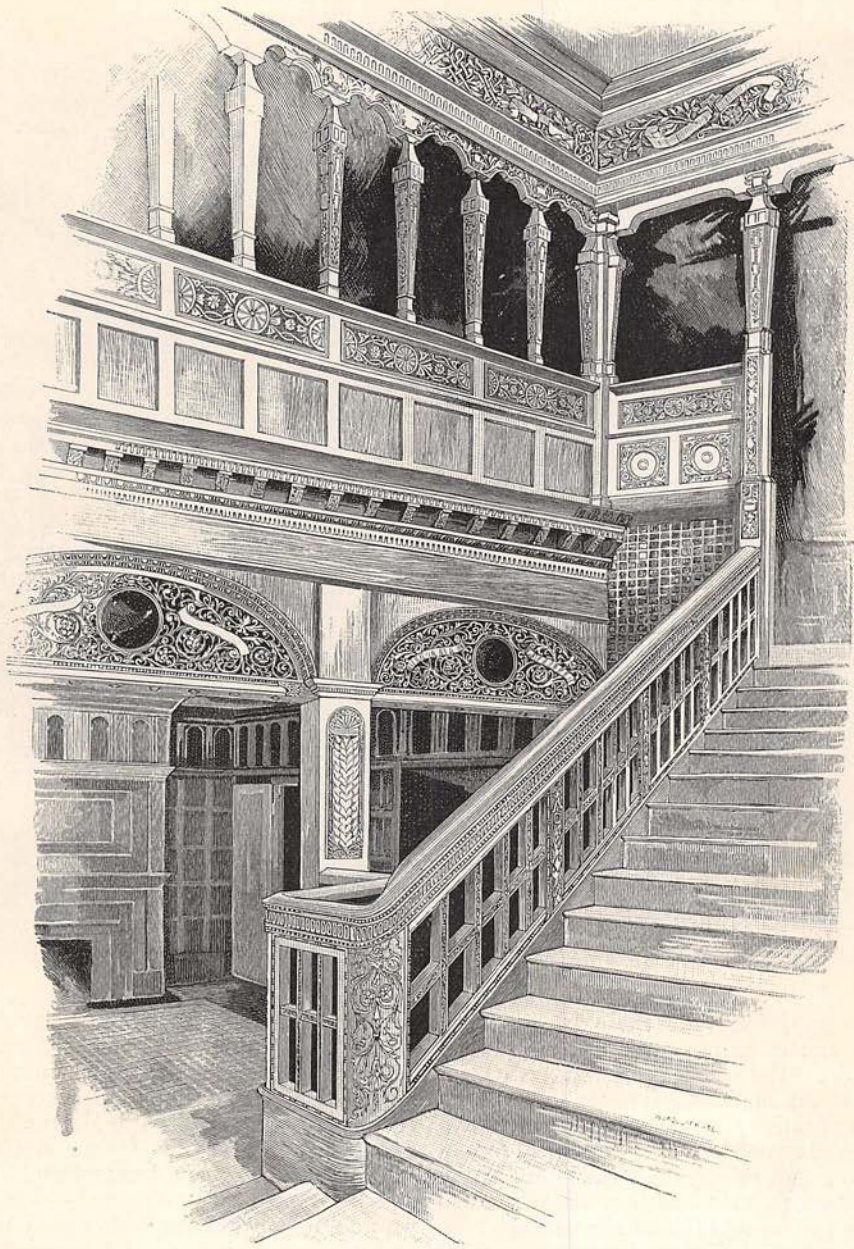


MR. JAMES HAVEMEYER'S EXTENSION ROOM, 50 WEST THIRTY-SEVENTH STREET.

worked in better with the general design — looked more as though it had taken its place and shape by virtue of an unmistakable impulse of artistic *growth*.

In Washington a very large amount of domestic building has been done during the last ten years. The land is cheap, and the streets are so laid out as to offer an unwonted variety of sites. But one can hardly say that the very best use has yet been made of these advantages. Many houses are generously and agreeably planned, but all their charm must be sought inside. Part of their exterior unat-

tractiveness is often attributed to the fact that Washington is a poor and economical town as compared with its rivals north and west. But such an excuse is quite invalid. Even though brick has been the main material, even though there has not often been much money to spend on decoration — even so, there is no reason why Washington houses should vary almost exclusively between barren nakedness and rather frantic essays in “Queen Anne.” Yet we may note a few exceptions, and note that they are increasing in numbers from year to year. Certain very simple brick structures are as-



STAIRCASE IN MR. C. T. BARNEY'S HOUSE, 10 EAST FIFTY-FIFTH STREET.

suming not unpleasing shapes, as, for instance, Mr. Hornblower's little apartment-house, the "Everett," on H street. And Mr. Richardson has built a great brick house which is impressive because very simple and very strong, but looks a trifle eccentric — perhaps because the latter good quality is somewhat over-emphasized. Mr. Richardson's manner is, in truth, almost too monumental to lend itself gracefully to domestic work. Yet he is always much more than well worthy of attention, and we

are interested to see what he will do with two other houses he is building now among the respectable old homes on Lafayette Square.

It would be an endless task did I try to go through our Western towns, noting all the variety of their efforts and all the tokens of progress they reveal. Many influences are striving in the West for mastery. English and German Gothic, French and German Renaissance, "Queen Anne," the Boston "swell front," the New York and also the

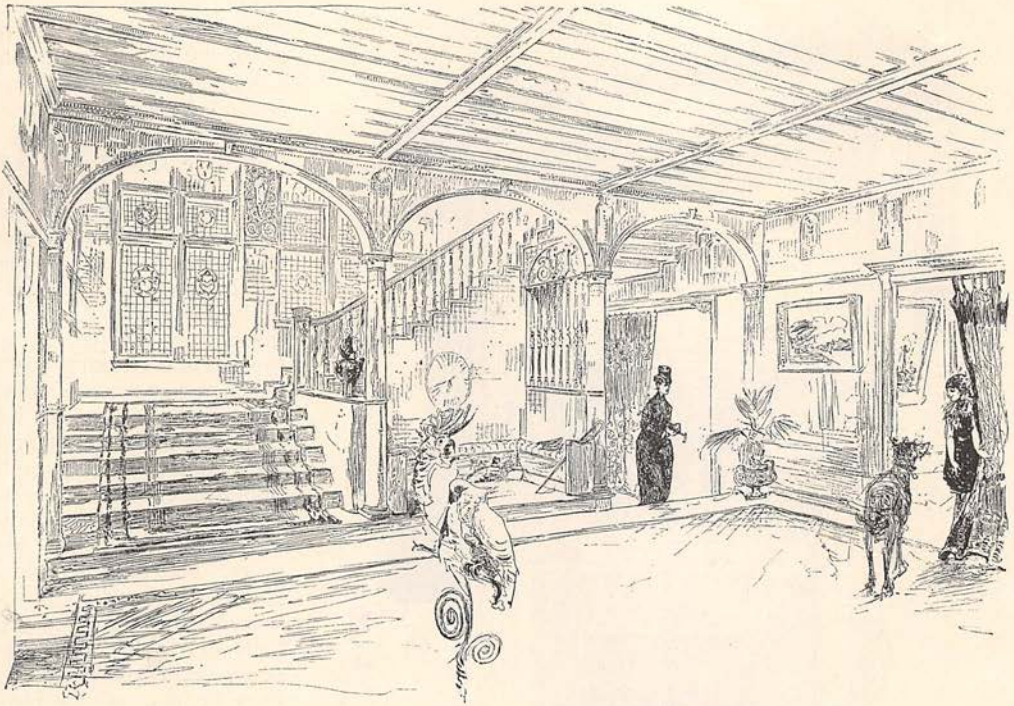


MR. C. T. BARNEY'S LIBRARY.

rural "vernacular;"—all these dwell side by side, if not in harmony, at least in mutual toleration. The speculator and contractor have not set the fashions here; the Western spirit is peculiarly prone to investigation, and Western towns offer a very wide field for experiment, since closely built blocks are hardly more common than spacious avenues lined by detached houses of great size and cost. In the general effect of these latter streets there is often much stateliness; and many individual houses are stately too, even when their details do not bear examination. As might be expected, we seldom find a slavish adherence to precedent, but very often a wildly eccentric "individuality" or an ignorantly audacious eclecticism. Yet I think the present tendency is toward the middle course of scholarly adaptation. I think each year shows more simplicity of conception, more reticence of manner, more artistic feeling in matters of detail. I may note especially that the great

roofs which have always been beloved "out West" are getting to assume quieter, more organic, and more reasonable shapes. I have no space to cite examples of success, but I cannot pass without a word Messrs. Cobb & Frost's new Union Club House in Chicago. It is not faultless as a composition, but it is massive, simple, quiet, dignified,—a structure we would gladly take in exchange, I am very sure, for any New York club-house, whether "vernacular" or "Queen Anne" in style.

And now to speak of our domestic interiors. If anything could be stupider than our old average exterior, it was certainly our old average interior. Yet it has been improving of late years with even swifter strides, and has now attained to a completer excellence. Here, again, we long excused our laziness with complaints as to the difficulty of a problem which certainly was not easy, yet was by no means so unmanageable as we said. Surely we ought sooner to have done something more than we



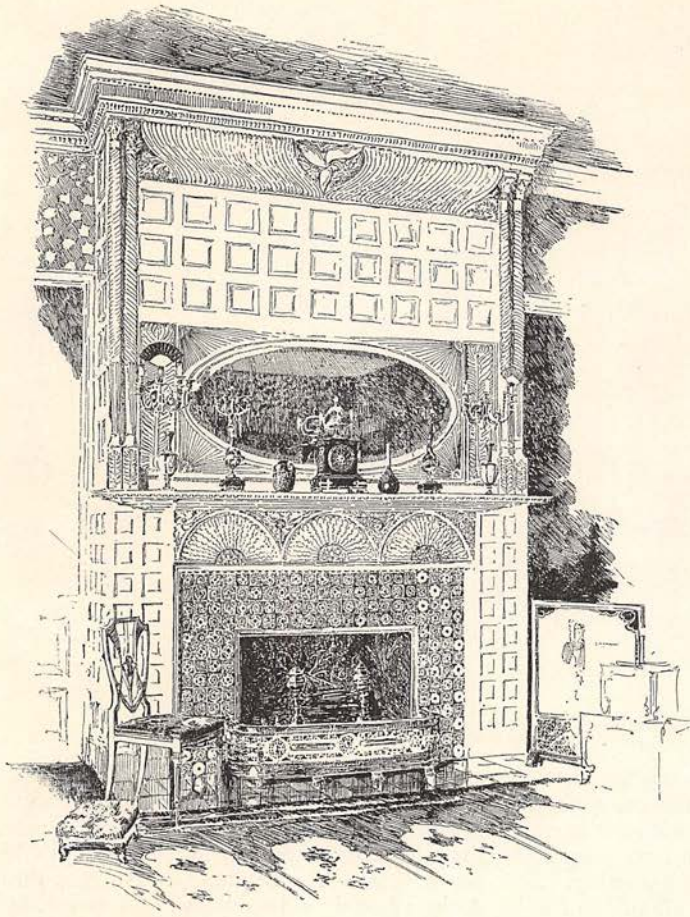
MR. CHARLES WHITTIER'S HALL, COMMONWEALTH AVENUE, BOSTON.

did even with a plan twenty-five feet by seventy — something more than to make the narrowest possible dark hall with the narrowest impossible staircase, and to put three equal-sized rooms one behind another. Nor need we so have forgotten all rules of proportion as to believe that a very high ceiling was intrinsically “elegant,” and must be secured no matter what our other dimensions. We might more properly have decided that if there is one thing a ceiling ought *not* to have, it is excessive height; better far that it should be too low, especially as with this decision would have come an amelioration of the chicken-ladders we were pleased to call our stairs. Nor would it have been difficult to improve these stairs still further, even though the rest of the plan had remained unaltered. Look at our illustration of a hall at No. 16 East Forty-first street, and we shall see how an ordinary house has been altered by Messrs. McKim, Mead & White. The stairs have simply been torn down, started again from the back, and turned on a landing half-way up. And the result is — an entrance space of decent width; a pretty effect of carved screen and balustrade and archway instead of the ugly old perspective; complete privacy for those who in using the stairs are no longer obliged to pass the entrance and the drawing-room door; and, consequent upon this last,

a possible omission of that servants' stairway which was so often a most harassing necessity.

Our plans will show how very much more than this has been accomplished in building new from the beginning. No. 724 Fifth Avenue is only a twenty-five foot house, but it looks a great deal larger when one is in it, and offers infinitely more of comfort and of beauty than we might think possible. The entrance-hall is a mere passage the width of the doorway. The front room, which thus gains greatly in breadth, is reached by a door at the end of this passage, where we step from it into the true hall, which fills the center of the house and has a great fire-place on one side and on the other a broad stairway with comfortable landings. But I will not describe what a drawing of the plan alone could tell with clearness, noting only the novel treatment of the back stairway, which is entirely built in and concealed from all save those who use it. The whole interior is transformed, and the wonder is that it took us so very long to see how such a transformation might be wrought.

A house by the same architects at No. 10 East Fifty-fifth street shows a similar arrangement of central hall and staircase. But as the lot is wider, the entrance-passage is broader, is no longer merely decorated but furnished too, and gives immediate access to the drawing-room. Such halls are sufficiently lighted



MR. NICHOLAS ANDERSON'S FIRE-PLACE, WASHINGTON.

by day through a skylight over the well, and at night are the most charming rooms of all. Many other houses of average size have been built upon the same general idea both by these architects (Messrs. McKim, Mead & White) and by others, and for a good result even twenty-five feet of width are not essential.* For none of all their many innovations are we more grateful than for the honor they pay the staircase. It may be, it always should be, and now it *is*, the very backbone of the house, not only as to use but as to beauty too. Yet for years we suppressed and compressed it into a shabby hideous instrument of torture.

In a physician's home domestic life and professional life should be separately accommodated, and the apartments devoted to the one should be isolated from those devoted to the other. Is it possible to do this within ordinary city limits? Or, if possible, will not space be too largely sacrificed? We might

answer doubtfully did not Messrs. Rotch & Tilden show us, in a house on Commonwealth Avenue in Boston, a quite ideal resolution of the problem.

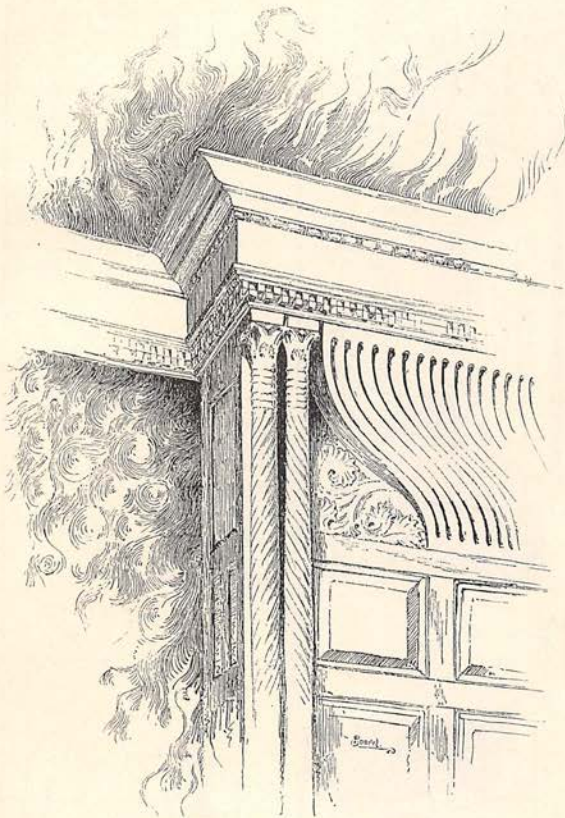
It is a twenty-five-foot English-basement house, with an entrance-passage in the middle that admits to a waiting-room on the one hand and to a consulting-room on the other. At the end of the passage is the true house-door beyond which no patient comes. This opens into a central hall with its fire-place and broad stairway well lighted from above. Beyond is the dining-room, the drawing-room being as usual upstairs. The back stairway is in an inclosed space reserved at one side of the hall—a doubly advantageous arrangement here, since by its means the physician can pass from his consulting-room to a library above, and above this once more to a bed-chamber. When he desires—for instance, or with infected clothing—he is thus able to live and move and have his professional being not merely without

disturbing his family but without passing through those parts of the house that are used by them. When we realize all this, and that there is not a corner lacking ample light, can we say that *nothing* is to be made even of an average house in the middle of a block?

The planning of a larger house may seem a less vital and a less difficult matter. It is certainly true that unintelligence will not here produce results intrinsically so bad. But its results will be just as bad when compared with the possibilities which offered—will sacrifice just as large a relative proportion of possible comfort, light, and beauty. More ingenuity and variety were sadly lacking in the arrangement of even our largest houses, but are conspicuously displayed in most of them to-day. We shall see this more clearly when our country homes are considered.

There is another important subject upon which too I need not dwell just now—the

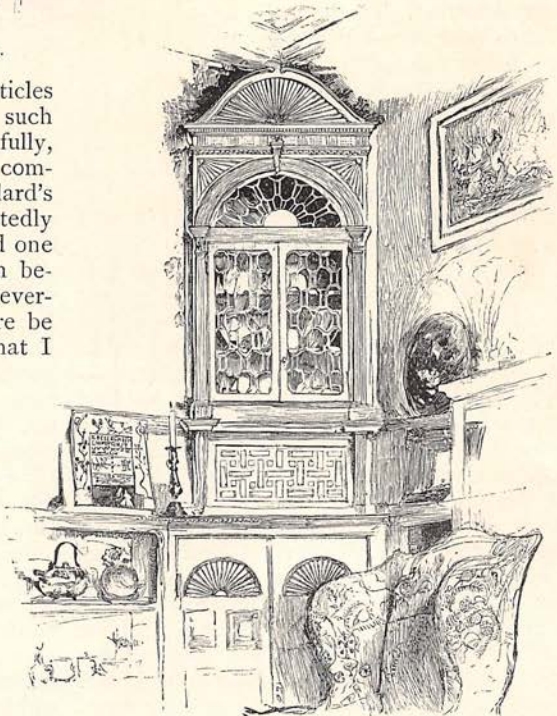
* See, for instance, the plan herewith given of the English-basement house built by Mr. Haight on East Fifty-fifth street.



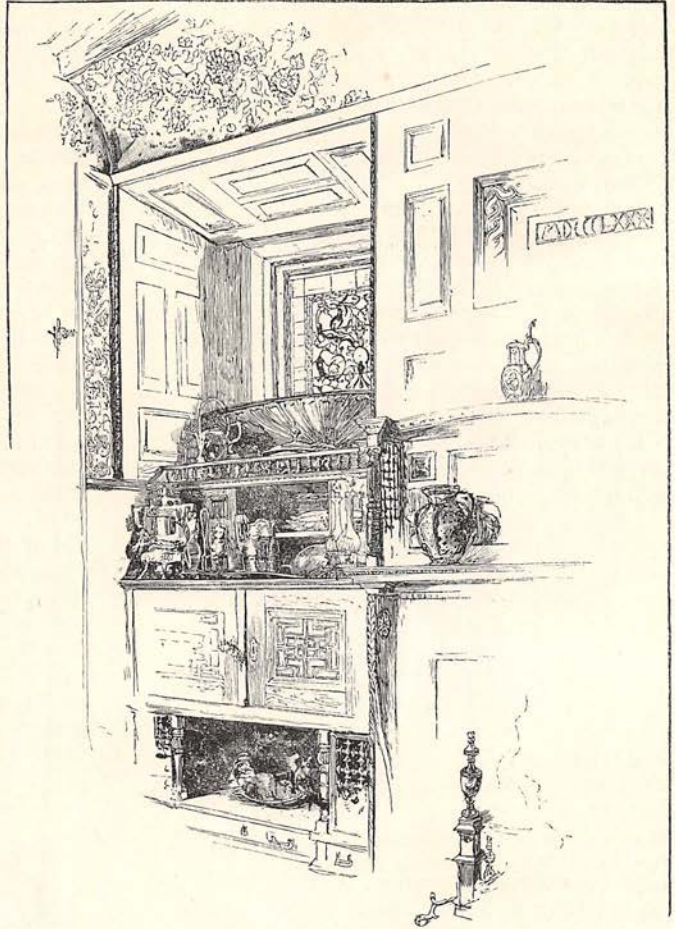
DETAIL OF MR. ANDERSON'S MANTEL.

subject of interior decoration. Certain articles are ere long to follow these in which such decoration will be treated specially and fully, and in which, I may add, a particularly complete description will be given of Mr. Villard's house on Madison Avenue—undoubtedly the finest interior we have to show, and one that would do us infinite credit if shown beside the best of any land. There are, nevertheless, certain remarks which must here be made. It is in itself a fortunate sign that I can say they *must*; for it is a sign that our interior decoration is a part of our *architecture* strictly so considered. A necessary state of things, it may be thought, and one which in itself is not much to boast of. Yet it was not so necessary but that we entirely escaped from it during very many years. The architect was utterly banished from our interiors during all the time that divided our old houses from those of the very recent renaissance we are now reviewing. When he had built his walls he seems to have been quite satisfied. And we were quite satisfied when we had

called in the carpenter to insert flimsy pine doors and meager machine-made moldings, the marble-cutter to set a clumsy stolid white mantel, and the plasterer to affix a ghastly cornice and to sweep a flourish of absurdity in the middle of the ceiling. We did not even remember the word decoration. We built our houses and we furnished them—that was all; and inside, *building* never meant anything accessory to the mere rude fabric. Even when we began to long a little after beauty, even when we first made our furniture more attractive, the same ignorance prevailed. We did not try to beautify our *house*, we only tried to fill it with beautiful things; and our subsequent attempts at real decoration were for a while superficial only—were demanded of the painter and the paper-hanger, not of the architect. It is only within years so few that we can almost count them on the fingers of one hand that we have tried to *build* interior beauty, to make it part and parcel of the house itself. But in our best work to-day it is the architect who has imagined the general effect and has planned for it in every detail—in the richly screened or

CORNER CUPBOARD IN HOUSE OF MR. F. F. THOMPSON,
283 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK.

balustraded staircase, in the wood-work everywhere, in the mantels which are a portion of the wall and not a mere excrescence, in the colors and patterns and materials for wall and ceiling, often in the shapes and colors and materials of the furniture itself. The good impulse has already descended, indeed, even to our speculative building—though, of course, it is not apt to reveal itself here in the most delightful manner. We have space for but one or two illustrations, and for no commentary whatsoever. I will only explain that the “extension room” of the house No. 50 West Thirty-seventh street is shown, not because of any great excellence, still less because it is at all characteristic of the work that Messrs. McKim, Mead & White enchant us with today, but simply because of its interest as one of our very first tentative essays in the right direction. The hall of No. 10 East Fifty-fifth street is a better example of their work. The Boston hall is theirs also—rather inadequately pictured, I am sorry to say; and the mantel is from Mr. Richardson’s house



DRESSER IN MR. HORACE WHITE'S HOUSE, 51 EAST FIFTY-FIFTH STREET.

in Washington. Let me only add, lest I should be grievously misunderstood, that I do not in the least undervalue the work that has been done by our decorators who are *not* architects. Certainly it is only by the aid of such that the architect is likely to succeed in his higher decorative efforts. No architect—in these days when artists are not Michael Angelos for versatility—can himself supply what a painter like Mr. La Farge will give him, or a sculptor like Mr. St. Gaudens. But, on the other hand, neither Mr. La Farge with his beautiful color in paint and glass, nor Mr. St. Gaudens with his beautiful form in bronze and stone, can do his best if the architect has not prepared the way for him. Such art as theirs, moreover, is a luxury for the very few, while architectural decoration is within the reach of every man who builds himself a home. For to be sufficient it need not imply the introduction of any unavoidable feature or any unnecessary detail. It need only mean that

each obligatory detail and feature, no matter how small or simple, has been included by the architect in his conception of the structure.

Many sins of omission rise before me as I try to bring these long pages to a close. For example, I have not even mentioned our hotels and our huge apartment-houses. Perhaps, however, the less said of them the better. They vary, writes an epigrammatic critic, “between the Scylla of monotony and the Charybdis of miscellany.” Scylla is, without doubt, the better haven. The Astor House and the Fifth Avenue Hotel seem at least more peaceful than those enormous up-town structures that are enwrapped in miscellanies at once riotous and puerile and vulgar. I know that the problem offered by huge buildings of the kind—with their twelve stories sometimes, and their innumerable small rooms within—is supremely discouraging. I know, too, that a large expenditure of pains and skill has often produced very good results in

the interior. Nor do I presume to say that there may not be good exteriors among the multitude that have been built in these latter years. I would only testify that, so far as I have seen in New York and elsewhere, there is but *one* which merits praise. This is Mr. Hardenberg's "Dakota," on the west side of Central Park.

And now I will give a final word to a very simple, plebeian little house lately built in New York on Greene street, just before it ends at Clinton Place. For I want to enforce once more the virtue—nay, the charm—that lies in mere solidity. Why is it that even when our walls are really quite thick and strong enough, they so often look like flimsy screens? It is partly because they are not well composed, but largely, also, because their strength is not shown outside, because we put the sash-frames close up to their outer

surface, leaving no visible depth of wall and preventing all play of light and shadow. The deep "reveals"—excellent technical name, since they show so much we want to see—of our iron façades may be cited as a virtue to set against their many sins. But it is a virtue often wanting to work that should in every way be better. We find it, though, in this Greene street house, and all the more conspicuously since there is no decoration to assist it. The windows—square and round-headed—are nicely proportioned, the wall-spaces are broad and quiet, and the string-courses are structurally expressive. But the effect would be far less satisfactory were it not for the unusual depth of the reveals and the consequent bold marking of the shadows. If something better could take the place of the present sordid little steps, this would, in its own modest way, be a very satisfactory little house indeed.

M. G. van Rensselaer.

ONE TOUCH OF NATURE.

CRUEL and wild the battle:
Great horses plunged and reared,
And through dust-cloud and smoke-cloud,
Blood-red with sunset's angry flush,
You heard the gun-shots rattle,
And, 'mid hoof-tramp and rush,
The shrieks of women speared.

For it was Russ and Turkoman,—
No quarter asked or given;
A whirl of frenzied hate and death
Across the desert driven.
Look! the half-naked horde gives way,
Fleeing frantic without breath,
Or hope, or will; and on behind
The troopers storm, in blood-thirst blind,
While, like a dreadful fountain-play,
The swords flash up, and fall, and slay—
Wives, grandsires, baby brows and gray,
Groan after groan, yell upon yell—
Are men but fiends, and is earth hell?

Nay, for out of the flight and fear
Spurs a Russian cuirassier;

In his arms a child he bears.
Her little foot bleeds; stern she stares
Back at the ruin of her race.
The small hurt creature sheds no tear,
Nor utters cry; but clinging still
To this one arm that does not kill,
She stares back with her baby face.

Apart, fenced round with ruined gear,
The hurrying horseman finds a space,
Where, with face crouched upon her knee,
A woman cowers. You see him stoop
And reach the child down tenderly,
Then dash away to join his troop.

How came one pulse of pity there—
One heart that would not slay, but save—
In all that Christ-forgotten sight?
Was there, far north by Neva's wave,
Some Russian girl in sleep-ropes white,
Making her peaceful evening prayer,
That Heaven's great mercy 'neath its care
Would keep and cover him to-night?

Anthony Morehead.