



AGRICULTURE, ADMINISTRATION, AND MINES BUILDINGS.

THE GREAT EXPOSITION AT OMAHA.

BY CHARLES HOWARD WALKER.

WITH PICTURES BY THE AUTHOR.

THE energy and enterprise of the Middle West have for long been proverbial. A country of unlimited horizons, of keen air and clear skies, its distances, instead of appalling its inhabitants, have encouraged a larger endeavor than is to be found among less expansive landscapes. It would almost seem that length of vision was coincident with extent of enterprise, and that the men of the corn- and wheat-land girded themselves to possess the earth with a courage born of the fact that their horizons included so ample a portion of it. But the infinite possibilities of the West have in many cases become limited actualities; and the people of the older States, while granting the facts borne in upon them of great undertakings successfully completed, and while sending their young blood to enrich still more that of the West, have arrogated to themselves the possession of certain factors which it was hardly to be expected would exist in a pioneer country. The appreciation of art and the power to produce it is, therefore, an unexpected element in many of the trans-Mississippi States; and it is this unexpected which has happened in the conception of the exposition of these States which is to be held in Omaha during the summer of 1898.

For many years to come, all expositions in America will be compared with the World's

Fair of 1893 at Chicago; and in order to maintain an individuality that should not be jeopardized by such comparison, a departure from the type of the Chicago Fair seemed advisable to the committee in charge of the Omaha Exposition. The first suggestion would be naturally to avoid similarity by a total change in the style of the architecture, and to adopt Oriental or bizarre designs for the various buildings; but it was recognized, as at Chicago, that the classic style would assure a greater scale and dignity of treatment, and would therefore be preferable. The problem became one of adapting similar conditions to those at Chicago in such a manner that the general effect would have individual character. This has been gained by the adoption of two general factors in the design which will, it is hoped, tend to produce a very unusual ensemble.

All the principal buildings are to be connected with one another by colonnades and cloistered courts, so that, after entering the gates, nearly a continuous mile of the exposition can be traversed under shelter. These colonnades, with the play of light and shade upon their groups of columns, with the constantly shifting vistas through which appear glimpses of lagoon, terraces, gardens, and backgrounds of foliage, will draw together

the isolated masses of the great exposition buildings into a whole as with the links of a richly decorated chain. The multiple repeated columns which cluster in the cloisters of Mt. St. Michel or of Monreale, and recede into dim recesses of distance in the mosque of Cordova, will gleam in the brilliant sunlight of the West in ever-varying composition of perpendicular shafts crowned with richly ornamented capitals.

And still further to enhance this unusual feature in the general design, color is to be introduced with liberality upon the exterior of the buildings. The general tone of the architectural background will be that of ivory; and upon this, in frieze and entablature, in the soffits and tympana of arches, in pediment and ceiling, the surfaces will be richly decorated.

The peculiar plan of the exposition grounds, which at first glance seemed an obstacle to breadth of treatment, has proved to be most favorable for unusual effects. The tract that is first entered by the visitor runs east and west, is nearly forty acres in extent, half a mile long, and seven hundred and eighty feet wide. The main entrance is at the center of the southern long boundary-line. Here is being erected an arch, which is to be of stone, and is to form a permanent entrance to one of the city's numerous parks. This Arch of the States, at the end of a long avenue leading from the center of the city, is crowned by a rich entablature, the frieze of which is formed of the coats of arms of the twenty-three trans-Mississippi States in colored faience. Under the eaves of the palaces of Florence and of Siena, in red and blue and gold, in the deep shadows of arch



ENTRANCE TO AGRICULTURAL BUILDING.

and cornice, flame the arms of the noble families of medieval Italy. In like manner, upon this arch the arms of this noble family of Western States will form a gleaming belt of emblems, in which the stars of empire, rivers, mountains, and plains, the wheat and corn, the plow and locomotive, will symbolize and perpetuate the enterprise of the pioneers. Upon the side of the arch the arms of the oldest States complete the frieze.

Passing through the arch, and entering the exposition grounds, the main tract stretches to left and to right. For nearly its entire length of half a mile it is intersected by a lagoon one hundred and fifty feet wide, spanned by three bridges, and reflecting the principal buildings which are upon each bank. The ground rises nearly twenty feet in height toward the east, but is level toward the west. At the westerly end, across the tract, the Government Building is placed. It has an impressive dome and a richly colonnaded entrance. The lagoon broadens in the form of a trefoil, four hundred feet from side to side, and terminates in front of this building, while upon each side semicircular colonnades lead to its wings. In the trefoil basin are to occur aquatic carnivals, fireworks, and processions of boats; and upon its shores, and in the midst of its surrounding colonnades, many thousands of people can be seated as in an amphitheater. The composition of the easterly end of the lagoon is of a different character. Here it was necessary to cross a broad street to gain access to the second tract of the grounds, which is

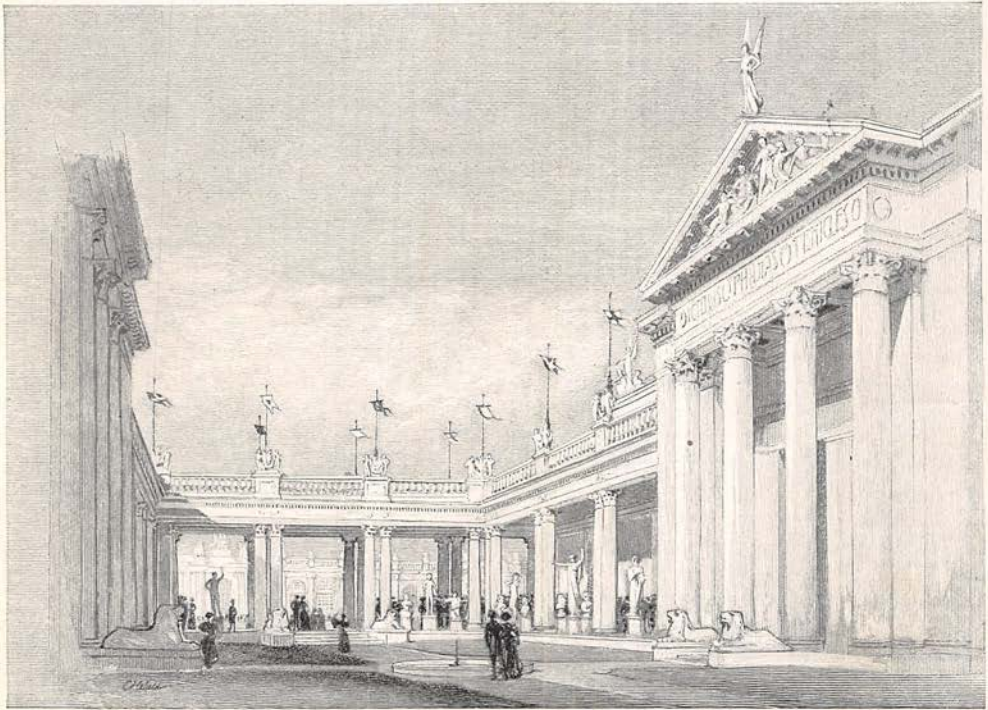


ENTRANCE TO MANUFACTURES BUILDING.

upon the bluff overlooking the Missouri; and a series of terraces, one above another, rise to a double staircase, crowned by a pavilion, and leading to the bridge.

Ascending the staircase, and looking westward, the length of the lagoon is seen in its entirety. Upon each side are the long lines of buildings connected by colonnades: on the south, in order, Manufactures, Liberal Arts, and Fine Arts; upon the north, Machinery and Electricity, Mines and Agriculture; while in the distance, half a mile away, the

minated by long ranges of the hills of Iowa and Nebraska. It is characteristic of the West in its expansiveness, and in the long afternoon light is very beautiful. South of the plaza is a portion of the grounds which is in the form of a park, in the midst of which is the Horticultural Building as a central feature, surrounded by gardens and parterres. Here will be the State buildings, the Apiary, and various minor buildings of the Exposition. North of the plaza the concessions begin, and these are a world in



COURT OF SCULPTURE OF THE FINE ARTS BUILDING.

vista is terminated by the glittering dome of the Government Building. At the middle of the southern side, the Arch of the States appears; while opposite it, at the north, the Administration Building forms a high central portion, and, with Mines and Agriculture upon each side, appears to be the main feature of a façade one thousand feet long.

Turning toward the east, and crossing the bridge, upon each side are large restaurants, with towers that form important features at the end of the grounds. Beyond these, a broad plaza with a stand for an orchestra upon the edge of the bluff is intended as a concourse for the people. The view toward the east and north from the plaza includes the entire Missouri valley for miles, and is ter-

minated by long ranges of the hills of Iowa and Nebraska. It is promised that never since time began has there been such a polyglot community as will be gathered together, and the feats of eccentric and interesting engineering are to be marvelous. The seesaws, gigantic umbrellas, and air-ships need no announcement; they are usually only too manifest; but beyond these, in the broadest portion of the grounds, there will be exhibits which are thoroughly characteristic of the trans-Mississippi country, and which will exemplify its success—exhibits of agriculture, of irrigation, of the dairy and stock-yards, and of mining. Much space has been devoted to these, and they will undoubtedly be of great interest.

And the Indian has not been forgotten.

Not only is there to be a gigantic tepee containing an ethnological museum, but an encampment of the fast-disappearing aborigines of the plains will give, for perhaps the last time, a picture of Indian customs and life. It is hardly a lifetime since the last councils of the chiefs were held upon the bluffs opposite Omaha, and already the Indian is somewhat of a curiosity in the land.

The detail of an exposition is inconceivable, except to those who undertake to carry it out. In this case the entire space of one hundred and sixty acres had to be graded, and many rods of roads and paths built; a lagoon to contain over seven million gallons excavated, made water-tight, and filled; at least ten large buildings built, some of which are over five hundred feet in length, with innumerable small structures; and an army of architects, painters, sculptors, engineers, draftsmen, and laborers controlled and kept busy; and fourteen months as the outside limit of time in which to complete the work! The architects-in-chief, Messrs. Walker & Kimball, and the superintendent of works, Mr. Geraldine, have had no time for inaction. The general scheme of the disposition of the buildings once established, the different buildings were allotted to well-known Western architects. Mr. Cass Gilbert of St. Paul designed the building devoted to Agriculture; Mr. J. J. Humphreys of Denver, that of Mines; Messrs. Eames & Young of St. Louis, the Art Building; while Machinery and Manufactures were given respectively to Messrs. Dwight H. Perkins and S. S. Beman of Chicago. The Liberal Arts Building is by Fisher & Lawrie, and the Horticultural Building by Charles Beindorff, both of Omaha. These gentlemen were given the general plan and grades of the grounds, with the disposition, size of all the buildings, the height of the main cornice-lines desired, and a module, or unit of measurement for their designs, of sixteen feet—this latter to insure uniform

scale. They had one week to prepare sketches, and then met at the office of the architects-in-chief in Omaha, compared their designs, revised them together to insure harmony of general effect, and departed to their respective cities to complete their work.

Within ten days the completed designs began to arrive, and the harmony of scale and unity of general impression produced by them are most unusual. Now began the making of the construction drawings by the architects-in-chief, and the subsequent construction of the buildings. Apart from the beauty of the several designs,—and some of them are very beautiful,—the most unusual of the buildings is that devoted to fine arts. This consists of two buildings, with a cloistered court between. Each building is in the form of a Greek cross, with the space between the arms filled by a mass lower than the remainder of the building. At the ends of the arms are porticos, and the whole is crowned by a low dome. One of these buildings is to be used for oil-paintings, the other for water-colors, blacks and whites, prints, etc.

The Government Building, which is being designed in the government office at Washington, is the highest on the grounds, and promises to be an exceptionally fine work of architecture. Messrs. Walker & Kimball, in addition to their work of making the general design of the architectural composition and all the construction drawings, are the architects of the permanent entrance arch, the Administration Building, the restaurants, and of all bridges, viaducts, colonnades, cloisters, etc.

However ephemeral is the material entity of such an exposition, the actual result of its existence is far-reaching, and lasts long. That it is educational in tendency is acknowledged; but apart from this, as a visual delight, as a few weeks' or months' visitation of more beautiful forms and colors than are usually existent in our city lives, it is an epoch-making memory.

THE HUMAN TOUCH.

BY RICHARD BURTON.

HIGH thoughts and noble in all lands
 Help me; my soul is fed by such.
 But ah, the touch of lips and hands—
 The human touch!
 Warm, vital, close, life's symbols dear,—
 These need I most, and now, and here.