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TOPICS OF THE TIME.

The Grant Memorial.

SELDOM indeed does any work of art bring with it responsibilities so grave as those which are involved in our contemplated memorial to General Grant. Not only for the sake of the monument itself, but for the sake of American art and the American people, is it peculiarly necessary that we should move warily in deciding who shall create it for us, and what he shall create, and how.

Art in America is just now in a transitional phase — which means in a very critical phase. New ideas, new creative impulses, new forces of unmistakable but unformulated vitality are stirring our painters, sculptors, architects, and are striving for the mastery over older tendencies, and also over that intellectual inertia which until lately characterized our public in its relation with things artistic. And this public,— we, the people,— in beginning to shake off our inertia, in beginning to feel that our interests and our children's children's are no less at stake than are the artist's, are becoming anxious to play a more intelligent part in patronage than we have ever played before. Exactly at the right moment we are now given a chance to prove our own growth in appreciation and to stimulate the growth of American art itself. Exactly at the right moment — neither too early nor too late — comes an unrivaled opportunity for us to act with energy, and for our act to have the most potent influence.

Unrivaled indeed our opportunity must be called, and great indeed must be the influence of its outcome. It involves, or should involve, a very lavish outlay and a very ambitious effort; the monument, by reason of its subject, will be incomparably conspicuous; and the subject itself is so rich in the noblest possibilities that success will mean a peculiar triumph, and failure will be trebly sorrowful and disastrous.

Let us think for a moment what is in truth this subject — what it is we must express if the Grant Memorial is to be all it should and to mean all it ought.

THE SUBJECT OF THE MEMORIAL.

FIRST, of course, we must adequately *represent* General Grant in his most characteristic aspect — in his aspect as a military commander. That is to say, we must represent him at full length and on horseback. Æsthetic reasons, it may be added, speak as loudly for an equestrian statue as do expressional reasons; for the modern world, with its disheartening dress, can never afford to disregard the chance of bringing a horse into the sculptor's scheme.

But our monument must *commemorate* General Grant as well as merely represent him — must record, or at least suggest, all that lies latent in his name and flashes upon the mind as we think or speak it. And this is much more than the fact of his successful generalship — much more than can be expressed by the sole aid of that equestrian statue which might suffice were some other military chief in question. When we think seriously of it, and try to analyze what our artist should do for us beyond and above the mere portrayal of the figure of a general, we cannot but feel how great was Grant's good fortune, how great is our good fortune, in that he died when and as he did.

Had he died in battle ere his work was entirely done, he would have been for us the leader of the armies of the North, and nothing more. Had he died while chief magistrate, the strife of party would have torn his image in two and clouded his memory for at least a portion of the people. His foreign tour was a fortunate sequel to his activity at home, showing us how he stood in foreign eyes as typical of the greatness and the influence of his country. And still more fortunate was the tragic, the pathetic way in which the stroke of death at last was given. Is it heartless to rejoice that ere he died he met for a moment with reproach of the cruelest kind, and struggled for months with a physical agony as cruel? Not unless it is wrong to be glad that after that reproach followed a burst of popular affection and respect, bringing the country back to an attitude even more sympathetic than it had held when first it chose him President, and to be glad that over his dying bed the South clasped hands with the North, and signed our articles of brotherhood anew. Euthanasia — *a happy death*. From a purely physical point of view the term indeed seems inappropriate. But from a higher, deeper point of view few deaths have been as happy as General Grant's — as happy alike for the dying and for the living. He himself, in the midst of his mortal anguish, felt this truth, and we are dull indeed if we do not feel it strongly. Not often does the good which we are fain to believe lies in and behind all human evil show itself so immediately and so clearly.

It is this, then,— it is the time and the manner and the results of General Grant's death,— which gives us the chance to make his memorial something nobler than a mere portrait of his person; which absolutely lays upon us the great and happy obligation to make it *a national memorial* in a different sense from that implied in a national subscription to defray its cost.

Seldom, be it said again, does such a chance occur, and hardly by any possibility more than once in the life of any one nation. The only similar opportunities which modern times have seen have as their outcome the monument built by the Germans in the Niederwald beside the Rhine, and the monument now building to Victor Emmanuel on the Capitol at Rome We misconceive the former, for example, if we think of it as a record of German conquest abroad, or of Prussian conquest in Germany. It is a record, rather, that the various peoples of Germany, so long disunited, bitterly antagonistic, actually at war among themselves, and so recently forced together by the strongest sword, had now accepted the brotherhood into which it had compelled them, and so cordially accepted it as to desire a permanent — that is, a great artistic — expression of the fact. That which is the motive of the Niederwald monument, that which still more purely and entirely will be the motive of the Italian monument, is

not the fact of internecine war, but the fact that internecine wars are past and done with, leaving a united fatherland contented in its union.

This too should be the motive of our memorial to Grant. And as the impulse and the opportunity to build it have been given by his death, so also do his character and history afford a text, a concrete theme, that could not well be more felicitous. Nor merely, be it remembered, as they were shown in the closing moments of his life. From the beginning he was patriot first, and soldier only because patriotism compelled; ready for war, but enamored of peace; looking upon conflict as a means and not an end, as a sad and bitter necessity, not "a glorious chance for glory"; rejoicing, not in the conquest of his foes, but in the fact that their conquest would make the land again a single land of friends and brothers. Even before the day of the final surrender, even before the moment when, with a homely simplicity and a touch of emotion that take us back to the pages of Plutarch, he went beyond the written letter of the "terms" and bade Lee tell his soldiers they might keep their horses,—"and take them home to work their little farms,"—Grant will show in the light of history as the friend of the South, and not merely as the champion of the North. Or, to put it more accurately still, history will see that he was first and always a true son of the commonwealth, and then from day to day whatever else the circumstances of each day impelled such a son to be.

These facts were patent long ago to all whose eyes were clear. The words that came to the dying man last summer from East and West and South, the answering words he spoke and wrote, the groups that gathered in imagination beside his bed and stood in person around his bier, did but emphasize and illuminate them; did but give them dramatic voice, palpable, visible, popular expression; did but bring them more entirely within the recording powers of art.

Can we doubt that very much of what they mean must be expressed in this contemplated work of art of ours if it is to be in any adequate sense a *memorial* of General Grant? Or can we doubt that a simple equestrian figure would be insufficient for the purpose? Or even an equestrian figure which, while less simply set before us, would still be the dominant feature to which all else would be subordinated? A mere pedestal, a mere architectural framework and setting, no matter how much enlarged and glorified, would still, if kept within its proper bounds as such, supply no adequate place or space for the suggestion of all we ought to say. Nor would the conception itself be adequately suggestive in general expression — tell as distinctly as it ought that what we had meant to build was *a national monument* enshrining the tomb of the nation's hero.

WHO SHALL MAKE THE MONUMENT?

IT is time now to ask: Where and how shall we select our executives, our artists? One part of the answer at least seems clear. We must look for them at home; they must be Americans, and not foreigners. Apart from the fact that the choice of a foreigner would mean a disastrous blow to that native art we are so peculiarly bound just now to cherish, apart from the negation of all proper sentiment which would be implied in such a choice,— apart, that is, from points which are among the most vitally important,— how could we expect to get from any foreign hand an adequate expression of our theme? It is a theme which needs that the mind should work upon it as well as the hand, and the heart as potently as either. Who but an American could put his heart into the matter? Who but an American could see into the heart of the matter itself? It was well enough (as regards both sentiment and the probability of a good result) to bid a foreigner mold us, for example, his countryman Lafayette, and to accept from a foreigner's hand a personification of that American liberty which is a thing any intelligent human eye can see and understand. But a memorial of General Grant—a great national monument! This must be given into American hands, or we shall fail in our part of the task, and shall have no right to look for aught but failure in the artist's.

But among Americans, how shall we select? Certainly not, again, in accordance with the pressure of local feeling. Although the monument is to stand in New York, it is not to be built by New Yorkers only or for the benefit of New York alone. No feeling of local prejudice or pride, no feeling that because New York is the metropolis of the Union therefore its artists are the best, or ought to be proclaimed the best, should have a jot of influence in determining our selection of an architect. An American by birth or by such length of residence and sympathy of understanding as transform the foreign-born into Americans in heart and mind — this we must look for, but we should not localize our search more narrowly.*

An architect has just been written; for it can hardly be questioned that we should find our architect first of all, or, at least, should give him the first share in the labor. When architecture must work with other arts and must supply more than a mere background or foundation for their efforts, there can be no doubt that it should take the initiative. The main idea, the plan, the *conception* must be the architect's; and then the putting into final shape, the elaborating in idea as well as in actual execution, should be his and his brother artists', working together and in harmony or intent.

WHAT KIND OF A STRUCTURE?

ERE now we choose our architect, we should have some distinct idea with regard to what kind of a structure he should give us — distinct, but not necessarily very detailed, and certainly not so dogmatic that he will be bound and hampered.

In certain cases we may best honor an honorable memory by a charitable or beneficent foundation of one sort or another. But in this case we may surely give the honor simply and solely as such; our pot of costly ointment may be poured out as a tribute to sentiment only, a homage to ideas alone. For once we may be intellectual, æsthetic in our aims, and not utilitarian in any other sense than as our work of art shall be useful for the cherishing of noble ideas and sentiments in the generations which will follow in the land. What we should ask our architect for is a dignified and beautiful building, as truly monumental in intention as in effect; some fair and stately structure which shall have as its heart the tomb of General Grant, and as

* We say this, be it noted, notwithstanding our personal belief that New York alone could afford us artists in every branch competent to do the work we shall require.

its most conspicuous ornament his figure, and which shall give ample room and fitting place for the depicting (or the suggesting in typical, ideal ways) of those memories and meanings which have been hinted at above.

It is needless to say that they have only been hinted at, not fully catalogued. It is needless to point out, for example, that we can hardly think of Grant without thinking of Lincoln too, or express the meaning of his life without remembering the share he played in the great act of Lincoln's life—in the abolition of slavery. And what other men before and beyond Lincoln himself are not hereby suggested in their turn! Does the theme seem too extended and the scheme an over-ambitious fancy? Not if what we want to do is the whole of what we ought to do with this marvelous opportunity, or the very best we might. And, it may be added, we need not of necessity aim at immediate completeness. We want our structure now and the tomb and the statue; but the rest may be left to come when it can. Come it undoubtedly will if the first steps be rightly taken. There is nothing which so encourages the giving and the creating of works of art as the knowledge that a splendid receptacle is waiting for their advent. Our receptacles for monumental art are not very numerous or very attractive, and, as a rule, they are identified with local and not with national pride. Such a national home and haven of art as this monument might be made would do incalculable service in the encouragement of American art — to-day and to-morrow and through many future years as well.

This aim, together with the presence of the tomb, may seem, in a climate such as ours, to prescribe extended covered spaces; especially as there is no reason why other forms of art should not be brought into play as well as the architect's and the sculptor's. There is every reason, indeed, why the contributions of all others should be desired; not only that the influence upon American art may be as wide as possible, but also because certain things can better be expressed by the painter or by the worker in glass, for instance, than by the carver of marble or the molder of bronze. The theme gives ample intellectual verge and opportunity for every art to play its interpretative part therein; and the structure should perhaps supply the due material space and opportunity for all.

Certain precedents, hallowed by age and by artistic value, unavoidably suggest themselves if we try to define our wants a little more narrowly still. Mediæval example points to church or chapel as the form such a memorial should wear. But to build a civic monument ecclesiastically would hardly be appropriate to the mental attitude of to-day. (There is no need to discuss whether this attitude be right or wrong; it is simply facts as they are that we must deal with.) Or would it, again, be appropriate to erect an example of that triumphal arch which from Roman days to these has so often been resorted to for the commemoration of military service? Would a triumphal arch give us space to say all we ought to say, or give us a fitting station for the tomb? And would its accepted symbolism as a type of military conquest be in keeping with just this hero militant of ours and with just those ideas which his monument should convey? It is a very beautiful form undoubtedly, and perhaps its symbolism might be so transmuted as to express that national unity which is the prime fact we wish to place on record. Moreover, it is a very *safe* form — one with which it would be difficult to produce a failure of the most distressing sort. To say this is undoubtedly to say much in its favor; and yet, as undoubtedly, we want to do something more than not go distressingly far astray. We want to tread in the best possible path and to reach the best possible goal. And perhaps something different from either of these traditional devices would serve our purpose best — something more purely *civic* in expression than, on the one hand, a triumphal arch, or, on the other hand, a mortuary chapel. But in any case (as has been said) it must be something neither prosaic in effect nor utilitarian in intention.

THE QUESTION OF STYLE.

AND now we are brought to the very interesting and important question of *style*. To choose our architect wisely will mean, of course, to choose one who can build intrinsically well; but, also, one who will be likely to build in harmony with the prepossessions of his countrymen at large. For to make the monument as helpful in its influence upon our art as possible, to make it as worthy an example of that art as possible, we must undoubtedly make it truthfully expressive, not only of its particular theme, but also of national artistic preferences and impulses *if such can be discovered to exist.*

It is plain, therefore, that the question of "style" cannot be decided theoretically or on pure æsthetic grounds alone. We must approach it, so to say, experimentally. We must study all the works of every kind and fashion we have built, pick out those which are most excellent, and then compare them very carefully — with an eye not for their details of difference, but for any broader signs of agreement (in execution or intention, in effect or aim) which may possibly lie beneath those details. We cannot hope to find proof of anything which is as yet to be called a national *style*; but perhaps we shall find indications of a nascent national *taste*, and if so they will be enough to guide us. But, be it added, we must seek them by the light of careful chronological data, for we have moved very fast of recent years, and it is important to distinguish between tendencies that are dying out and tendencies that are growing.

The general belief perhaps is that, no matter how carefully conducted, such a search will be made in vain. But this general belief is founded largely upon our ignorance of what has recently been done in architecture throughout the length and breadth of the land, and somewhat upon our ignorance of architecture itself — our inability so to read its language as to see what has been aimed at no less than what has been achieved, and to mark main lines of agreement beneath surface variations. A more widely extended and carefuller survey seems to show that there are certain manners of architectural speech which we are beginning to prefer above all others, and which appear in more of our recent good results than do any others. These are the manners which emphasize the *round arch* in preference to the lintel or the pointed arch.

This assertion may seem too confident, but indeed it is not. More and more as each year goes by (and a year may mean a good deal in rapid times like ours)

we show a preference for round-arched methods of construction; sometimes for those of ancient Roman parentage, much more often for those which developed in the earlier days of the Italian Renaissance, and still more often, perhaps, for those which grew up in the intermediate centuries — for those which are called the Romanesque.

Had we examined the matter in a superficially theoretic way, a round-arched architecture might have seemed the last that was likely to appeal to us. Neither the most conspicuous examples of current work abroad nor our own descent in blood and speech might have seemed to lead us to it. But even a theoretic inquiry seems to point in its direction if made in a less superficial way — if made upon the data given, not by our origin, but by the degree to which we have grown to differ from our nearest European cousins and more nearly to resemble certain southern peoples; not by our speech, but by our present social and political condition; and especially by that climate which has done so much toward molding us, and must do so much toward molding our architecture too. It was said above, indeed, that we should not depend for guidance upon *any* theorizings. Yet if they are not too superficially made, and if they seem to tend toward the same outcome as do experimental inquiries, we may at least respect their confirmatory voice.

For example, while we need not and cannot agree with a recent writer (whose text was also the Grant Monument)* in his opinions upon the status and the character of our art to-day, we may gladly cite the fact that he gives his vote for the round arch. He decides, theoretically, that it is what we *ought* to want, and the fact is valuable if those signs are trustworthy which seem to show that it is what we *do* want.

Still more valuable is the testimony of so serious and well-qualified a theorizer as the English historian Freeman, when he tells us that he thought in advance of his visit to our country that a round-arched style might possibly best suit our climate and best suit ourselves. And highly valuable is the fact that this speculation of Mr. Freeman's was changed to a belief by what he found already existing on our soil.† Had he written to-day, moreover, instead of some years ago, or could he even look to-day through the pages of our professional journals (where the very best work of the very best hands is not always illustrated, but where the general tendencies of our art in all quarters of the land may be deciphered),— could he see as clearly and know as thoroughly as those who are to control the erection of our monument ought to know and see,— then it is very certain that his words would read with still greater emphasis.

Nor should we forget to note, and as a very important point, that in using the round arch, whether in its Romanesque or in its Renaissance variety, we do not in our best examples use it either stupidly or foolishly. We do not use it conventionally, in an imitative, slavish, cold, and lifeless antiquarian fashion; or recklessly, fantastically, to the destruction of all artistic harmony and expressional truth. Study these best examples (they are neither few nor hard to find nor by any means identical), and we shall see that it is used freely, flexibly, and sensibly, in accordance with modern ideas and in deference to the needs of individual cases; that it is used in combination with other elements drawn from other sources, and yet in such a way that it governs the general expression and there is no disharmony, no effect as of patchwork and piecework in the result. Of course all the examples in which it is used are not similarly excellent. But a good intention is often plain even when the outcome has patent faults; and to confess failures and discrepancies is only to confess again that we have not yet a national *style*. It is by no means to deny that we have already a budding, promising national *taste* which points in the direction of the round arch. This is surely enough to guide us in our present quest, unless similar evidence of a similar degree of strength can be cited to show as wide-spread a taste pointing in some other architectural direction; and, it may confidently be said, there is no chance of this. Nor need we be deterred from falling in with the taste which prefers the round arch by any slightest fear that a design based thereupon could not most adequately and beautifully give us just the sort of structure we want or just the opportunities we need for the employment of all the arts that can be allied with the builder's.

If all these things be true, then we should undoubtedly select some architect whose natural affinities tend in the direction of the round arch, and whose practice has given him a key to its resources; and, moreover, one who has been used to employing it in monumental work — that is to say, of course, not necessarily in such commemorative monuments as the one we now desire, but in work where dignity, beauty, and expression have been of prime concern.

And so with those other artists who must help and supplement the architect: we should try to choose such as are able not only to work intrinsically well, but to work well for monumental purposes and in the expression of other than strictly "realistic" intentions; for grandeur of conception and ideality of treatment will be prescribed by many portions of our theme at least. It is not only that simple representation — a simple record of facts as they actually occurred — would very often, with our modern dress, be monotonous and unlovely to the eye; such treatment could not fully express the potency of those facts, their inspiration, their results, their inner meaning. The spiritual side, the heart of the matter should be laid bare, and not its shell alone portrayed; and to reveal the heart of such a matter needs the help of that higher, deeper, subtiler kind of art which for the want of a better term we are content to call *idealistic*. The artist, if we can find the right one, will know how to employ it rightly — will not fall into conventional allegory, dreary, meaningless metaphor, but will preserve human, historic life and truth while illuminating them with the light of imaginative sentiment.

This is not the place to explain how certain it is that we *can* find the right artists if only we search wisely. To explain the present condition of our art, to point out its recent successes and gauge their prophecies in relation to our present subject, would involve the citing of many examples and the discussing of many names; all of which might savor, perhaps, of special pleading. No more, therefore, can here be said than that if we

* "Style and the Monument," *North American Review*, November, 1885.

† *Longman's Magazine*, quoted in the *American Architect*, February 24, 1883.

want such service as has been indicated in the preceding pages, or any analogous service, or service of any noble kind whatever, our hope of getting it may rest on good foundations. We have artists in every branch who might do all that has been suggested here, and do it well; whose existing work we might be eager to match against the best work of any European country, excepting only France. Nor need we blush to think of a comparison with the best work of France itself in such an example as our monument may be, if we give them for once a chance to do their very noblest. We may prophesy of the Memorial with hope and confidence, and base our prophecy not upon vague dreams of what we might produce if our art were something other than it is, but upon a knowledge of what it already is and of what those who produce it can undoubtedly achieve — *if* we select the best among them, and then help with intelligent sympathy and a generous hand.

THE FAME OF GRANT AND OF LINCOLN.

IF it needs anything more than the thought of our own possible profit to make us resolve to be careful, wise, and liberal in this matter, we may remember how conspicuously we shall be acting in the eyes of the outer world. The inception of our monument will be followed abroad with keen and critical attention. Its eventual shape will be pictured in every illustrated sheet for the benefit of stay-at-homes, and, before all our other works of art, will attract the feet of those who cross the water. Whatever we build, it will be everywhere known and will be everywhere accepted as the great typical example of American art.

Perhaps we do not realize how emphatically this will be the case — do not realize how high above all contemporary Americans General Grant has stood in the interest of other lands. Lincoln's is the only figure that could possibly have come into rivalry with his. But Lincoln died long ere foreign interest was to as distinct a degree as it is to-day a sympathetic (or at least a respectful) interest, while Grant lived long enough to share in the reaction that has followed upon the old antagonism, and to concentrate much of the new-born sympathy upon his own person. If a monument to Lincoln were in question, foreign interest would be far less pronounced, and, moreover, far less intelligent. No European, be he even an Englishman, can quite understand Lincoln or the whole of the reasons why his memory is dear to us.

The chief of a great nation in the throes of a great civil war, who ruled, not like a Prussian king, according to his own or his immediate counselors' ideas of right and of expediency, and not like an English minister, according to the dictates of a parliament merely, but as the executive of the nation at large in a truer sense than man ever did before; who ruled with his finger on the people's pulse and his ear at the people's heart, feeling thrills and throbs quite imperceptible to others; who waited patiently till they were perceptible to him beyond the possibility of mistake, and then acted with decision and persisted with tenacity; who seemed to lead, and in overt acts did lead in truth, but who *executed*, none the less, just what the people, half unconsciously, wished to do and were incapable of doing save through a hand as sensitive and strong as his; a chief who ruled thus amid difficulties and dangers of the most tremendous and of the most subtle sorts, yet who sat day after day, year after year, with his door open to all comers and his sympathy awaiting all; as eager to help individuals as to help the nation; as responsive to the trouble of the humblest citizen as to the trouble of the state; the father of his people at once in the widest political and in the most intimate personal sense,— this and very much more than this was Lincoln. How indeed should he be understood in lands where *to rule* means something so different?

But with Grant the case stands otherwise. A great organizer of armies, planner of campaigns, winner of victories — this is easily enough understood in any country; perhaps not exactly in all of its significance as applied to General Grant, but yet nearly enough for at least a great part of our debt to him to be felt with sympathy. And thus, as he himself during his foreign tour stood in the eyes of Europe as the symbol of his country in her hour of reunion and reinstatement in the great family of nations, so his monument, whatever we may make it, will assuredly stand as the type of the highest his countrymen can wish to do in art and the very best they can accomplish.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR FAILURE.

IF it is anything less than a noble type, the fault will not lie with our art. It will lie with the public, with *us;* because those who directly control the matter will be assumed to represent the public, and *will* represent it — either as expending lavish popular gifts and putting into execution clear and sensible popular wishes, or else as showing, by poverty of material resource and wrongfulness of artistic act, that the public has been without enthusiasm and without vital or intelligent desires. If it is anything less than a noble type, our art will suffer shame and injury; but the responsibility, the sin, will rest with the committees in charge and with us whose representatives they are.

Good Signs on the Lecture Platform.

DR. HOLLAND used to deplore the change that had come over the lecture system, a change which he attributed to the lecture-bureau, which of late years has come into vogue. In the number of this magazine for March, 1871, he deprecated the appearance in lecture courses of men of inferior talent, mere amusers of the public. "Some of them," he said, "have been either pushed or invited into nearly every lecture course, until sensible men have become disgusted, and have given up the lecture as a thing that does not pay. The good lecturers have been cheapened by association with their inferiors in gifts and aims, and the 'lecture system' has degenerated into a string of entertainments that have no earnest purpose and minister to no manly and womanly want."

Dr. Holland's picture of the contemporary lecture platform was by one who knew well what he described. It is encouraging to note, however, that during the last few years there have been signs, not perhaps of a revival of the lecture system of twenty or thirty years ago, when men as earnest as Emerson, Phillips, Beecher, Chapin, and Holland, and men of the literary position and oratorical force of Curtis, Mitchell, and Bayard Taylor were among the principal lecturers,—