

Well, it is to laugh, anyway!

Yes, I fear it is. But what a woeful come-down from my dream. What a singular débâcle of a vision, old in story, rich in wonder, of a people proud in conquest, wise in laws — what a deep descent to this frenetic pigeon-house you call a bank.

Yes, but you didn't say so in the beginning.

I was dreaming — and you woke me.

X. A Roman Temple (2)

Even after what you have said, I really don't see why, as a matter of common privilege, a man shouldn't make an imitation Roman temple if he wishes to do so. Isn't it, after all is said and done, a question of temperamental selection, of scholarship, of individual taste?

I don't either, if he will make it in his own back yard. If it is for his own private use, gratification or amusement, I see no objection. But, when he puts it on the people's highway, and labels it modern American architecture, there are those who will cry humbug, and, what is worse, will prove it. Furthermore, the true architectural art, that art toward which I would lead you, rests, not upon scholarship, but upon human powers; and, therefore, it is to be tested, not by the fruits of scholarship, but by the touch-stone of humanity. Taste is one of the weaker words in our language. It means a little less than something, a little more than nothing; certainly it conveys no suggestion of potency. It savors of accomplishment, in the fashionable sense, not of power to accomplish in the creative sense. It expresses a familiarity with what is *au courant* among persons of so-called culture, of so-called good form. It is essentially a second-hand word, and can have no place in the working vocabulary of those who demand thought and action at first hand. To say that a thing is tasty or tasteful is, practically, to say nothing at all. But, the word humbug is only a little less strong than the word fraud; and to say of the imitation Roman temple that it is a specious imposition is to put the charge mildly. We make a great to-do when a bank officer diverts some of its funds to his own use — we call that misappropriation, defalcation, abuse of confidence, betrayal of trust, and all sorts of harsh names, and we put him in the penitentiary if he is not clever enough to keep out of it. But when a man betrays a trust that the people at large have placed in his hands — a specific trust that is expressed in the word architect, we call his weakness taste, scholarship, temperamental selection, and all sorts of euphemistic names. In reality there is no valid moral distinction to be made between the men. It is the capacity correctly to weigh the values at stake that is at fault. What is everybody's business has become nobody's business; and this incapacity, this indifference, it is the function of the critic to rectify; otherwise architecture, as a fine art, goes to the bargain counter, and the people become merely shoppers; and so, through bargain and sale, values must tend ever downward, and the buyers ever grow more sordid, until, all settle at last into the

mire of democracy gone wrong, and the people learn, at last, to their cost and chagrin, what it means to have leaders who betray them. For such is the course of democracy — either downward or upward. The stability and the value of democracy depend, when the last word is said, upon the fidelity of those to whom the people delegate their powers.

Well, that begins to sound like business. I thought, at first, that your point of view was personal, but I begin to understand that it is not; it is broader. So, I take it, you hold that the modern imitation of a Roman temple is not a good thing under any circumstances?

Certainly it is not; especially in America. Scholarship has its uses, its most excellent uses. But when scholarship becomes a fixed habit of mind, that very habit unquestionably enfeebles creative power. It is well that we should know what the Roman temple was in fact, as nearly as we, through archaeological inquiry, can arrive at it. But the deepest reach of our scholarship will reveal only this: that the Roman temple was a part of Roman life — not of American life; that it beat with the Roman pulse, was in touch with Roman activities; and that it waned with Roman glory — it died a Roman death. The Roman temple can no more exist in fact on Monroe Street, Chicago, U. S. A., than can Roman civilization exist there. Such a structure must of necessity be a simulacrum, a ghost.

Of course you and I know well enough that the reason why the bank building is an imitation Roman temple is because it is easy and cheap to make that sort of thing — but the people at large do not know it. They do not know how easy it is for the architect to turn to a book of plates, pick out what he wants, and pass it on to a draughtsman who will chew this particular architectural cud for a stipend. They do not know that when it is done, and is lauded, by its alleged architect, as in the Roman style, that, in reality, it is in the hand-me-down style. When done it's cheap, and it is as slovenly as it is cheap. Such things are false enough when they are done in the spirit of highest, most careful, most industrious scholarship. But as for this bargain-Friday performance, this commercial smear, what is to be said otherwise than in terms befitting so crumpled and soiled a by-product.

I begin to surmise that you don't quite like the imitation Roman temple. In fact, you have almost said so, in a roundabout way.

Furthermore, if the pseudo-Roman temple were good for any one thing American, it must, *ipso facto*, be good for anything and everything American, because American means American, and expresses the genius of the people. But Roman does not mean American, never did mean American, never can mean American. Roman was Roman; American is, and is to be, American. The architect should know this without our teaching, and I suspect that he does know it very well in his unmercenary moments. The public would know it instinctively if they were not continually bamboozled and wheedled by architects and thus bereft of their sense of fitness; and so could become free to regard the architect in any other light than his self-made one of peddler of fashions.

Now where does the responsibility justly lie? Who is to be censured in this particular case? Is it to be the banker who pays for the building and feels no further concern unless it be a pride in his expenditure and a pleasurable blush as he preens his sense of public spirit? Or is it to be the public who delegate the power and the func-

tion to build and let it go at that? Or is it to be the architect? Who is creating a false impression, who is holding up a misleading standard, who is demoralizing popular education — the banker, the public, or the architect?

Who is wound about with left-handed notions of what the architectural art is in reality?

Is architecture a plaything, or is it a great force — a revelation of human character and an inspiration? Is it a remnant, or is it a whole cloth from which we are to make for us new garments? Is it human, now, or is it post-human? Has it a foundation, or has it none? Is it a part of human utterance, is it a phase of universal speech, or is it dumb? Is the art I advocate to be built upon the sands of books, upon the shoals of taste and scholarship, or is it to be founded upon the rock of Character?

What I say to you is either witless or significant. To discern which it may be, we must lock horns with our conditions — we must either throw or be thrown. So, open your eyes that you may see with the clarity of the spirit that which is of the spirit. To half close your eyes is to belittle the creative power of man. Touch not with feeble finger the exuberant pulse of democracy. And do not throw a noble art into the sewer.

But let me tell you now that, to grasp masterfully, you must first feel the surge of psychic power; to realize your responsibilities you must first truly know them.

To know your art you must broaden your sympathies, not constrict them; you must nurture your mind, not forsake it.

Strive then, so that, when your time comes, you may not be a misfit in your day and generation.¹