

VII

THEORY OF ARCHITECTURE

'Beauty lives with kindness.'—*Two Gentlemen of Verona*.

IF you try to find out what a modern architect has 'the will to believe' it is likely to appear something like this—Architecture is the supreme Art: it is produced by genius. An architect must have genius. Moreover, there have in the past been wonderful manifestations of art-genius called Styles, and the architect must know about these, that is, about one or two of them which he may select, and he must imitate the features of those. True architecture addresses itself to an aesthetic faculty, and aesthetical satisfaction is obtained by handling the style elements in a tactful and tasteful way in architectural designs.

For Webb this would not do; he was endowed with an inquiring mind, and he needed a General Theory for his belief, a ground on which to stand, a foundation to build on. We often discussed the question and I put down here what I understood of his teaching under a dozen headings.

Common Tradition

Architecture to Webb was first of all a common tradition of honest building. The great architectures of the past had been noble customary ways of building, naturally developed by the craftsmen engaged in the actual works. Building is a folk art. And all art to Webb meant folk expression embodied and expanding in the several mediums of different materials. Architecture was naturally found

out in doing; it is the very opposite of the whim 'designs' we are so excited about exhibiting. In a word, architecture is building traditionally.

There can be no arts of the old kind until by some means folk traditions are once more regained so that builders and employers accept the natural expression of the moment. "Till the employer knows clearly what the architect is going to do for him no reasonable building will come about."¹ All style-imitation is trivial and futile. "It is patent from the laborious efforts of well-meaning architects, from the time of the younger Pugin to that of the late Mr. —, that they have worked on a sand-hill. Many of the results indeed are childish efforts which only call forth contempt almost before the scaffolding is removed from such wasted labour." The spirit essence of such designs in the styles has nothing whatsoever in common with the natural work of old builders—"father to son witnessing of undoubting endeavour".

The works of Morris and of Burne-Jones have often been spoken of as 'mediæval', but they were not intended to be, nor were Webb's. All tried to be modern. Ruskin finely spoke of Burne-Jones's 'true relation with the paternal and everlasting Art in the world'. Burne-Jones said of Morris: 'All his life he hated the copying of ancient work as unfair to the old and stupid for the present—only good for inspiration and hope.' Morris said of himself: 'I cannot think that I ever consciously aimed at any particular style; I by nature turn to romance rather than classicalism and naturally without effort shrink from rhetoric.' By 'romance' he did not mean the mediæval; at a lecture I heard him say 'by romantic I mean looking as if something was going on'. It was making an effort in the present instead of pretending that

¹ Quotations in this form " " are from Webb; others are given thus ' '.

something past had been perfect. Webb wrote to me on the death of a gifted mediævalist architect, "True, X—has been a disappointing man. W.M. recognised that he had 'taste.' He was always shy on the road, and harnessed himself with blinkers—has it not been from fear, the opposite of divine courage?" "Harnessed himself with blinkers!" the phrase bears repetition. Webb *intended* to see clear and straight; he had his eyes set on being rational and of his own time.

October 18, 1901: Having been asked to express an opinion on the stipulation for the Liverpool Cathedral competition "that the style of the new Cathedral shall be 'Gothic'" (!), he replied that "the restriction has something of the visage of humour in it. The nature of Classic, Gothic, and 'squaring the circle' can hardly, so to speak, be 'tasted in a sip.' Were any of the designs made for the earlier Liverpool competition as 'Gothic' as St. Sophia, or St. Vitale, or St. Paul's?" . . .

In a letter to Mr. Percy Wyndham, in answer to some kindly appreciation of his work at Clouds, and speaking of it as "the house of the age", Webb replied:

"July 20, 1886.

"There are two classes of houses which would rightly come under the title. The first is the majority one, the natural style of a 'shoddy period,' of which the houses in Tyburn, Belgravia, Victoria Street, etc., and their kind in the country, give the type which might be called Victorian. The second is the non-natural class, of which the mediæval style is represented by the Law Courts, the scholastic by the British Museum, the showy by the Club houses, and the dilettante-picturesque by the so-called Queen Anne style. All these styles are exceedingly artificial and have been run to death by fashion. As to my

'keeping people at arm's length,' if what you hint at thereby is true, it would merely be that I do not lay myself out to do work for people who do not in any degree want what I could honestly do for them."

Building Craft

Of a gifted young man he wrote: "Poor young X— carried on the crest of a wave to a frowning coast whitened with professional bones. What can an infant almost in arms do under such malice of fate? Y— can hardly help him to mastership in the building craft." Modern architecture, if we ever have any, will be *Mastership in Building-craft* developed out of contact with needs and materials. It won't be design in the air; it will not be what he called "swell-domania". I asked Webb why Morris gave up architecture. "Because he found he could not get into close contact with it; it had to be done at second hand." The beginning of training for building and design must be on the works and in the shops. Architecting is a responsible business, like commanding a ship. Building is an art of doing. The architect cannot learn all the ways of workmanship, or may not master even one craft, but actual doing is necessary at the foundation to give a direction to the mind. The skilled foreman with an all-round instinct for the building crafts was only apprenticed to one of them; the architect should be an upper foreman. The best that Webb knew of building he would say had been gained in discussions with workmen. "Of course the craftsmanship part is a hard qualification for an architect in our own blind-guided days." He was deeply interested in limes and mortars, the proper ways of laying roof tiles and forming chimneys, of finishing plaster ceilings and mixing whitewash. He forced himself to become an expert in ventilation and drainage. On

his making an inspection of a new drainage system he said: "Now this is so beautiful I don't like it to be covered up." In heating he was quite an authority, and he devised some excellent grates. He had a turn for experiment, his training in a country office was much more builder-like than anything now obtainable; the work of the Morris firm had increased his practical experience, and some actual modelling, wood engraving, and decorative painting had helped, but all, he felt, was insufficient.

To A. H. Powell.

"March 17, 1894.

"It would be good fortune for you if you could so arrange things as to have a year's continuous work at carpentering in its various kinds. Of course I know this may be impossible, but if so I should say that would be a misfortune. As you would be keeping your eyes wide open to all collateral things, you would pick up much general knowledge of the various other crafts connected with building and would gain much more help to your after work than in any other way. . . ."

To A. H. P.

"March 28, 1894.

"If you can get the experience of twelve months or so in a live workshop, and the outlying buildings, you will be saved a constant series of troubles in your future work. It has only been by constantly keeping my eyes open, talking freely whenever possible with all kinds of workmen, and reasoning out the knowledge gained that I have had any professional peace of mind for the last forty years. Three parts of the striving under conscious ignorance would have been avoided if I had 'served' as you are now doing. Mind you, you too must—if you would be wise in future—keep your eyes open. Keeping the eyes shut is just the trap into which regular workmen fall."

To A. H. P.

“December 3, 1898.

“... I rather question if Aberthaw lime was quite the best for the outside plastering in question: my experience of that lime is that it is too sharp, and I should think liable to shrink. I never actually used it, but tried an experiment with it and concluded to use blue lias instead. I should not wonder if there are fine hair-cracks in it, not readily discernible with the nude eye. Perhaps and if this is so, two or even three coats of hot lime and Russian tallow might fill up these pores and keep the rain from being absorbed by the plaster. You see when the walling is dashed with rain by a high wind it becomes very wet, and the wind acts as hydraulic pressure. In the house I am building at Puttenham the bedroom walls, which are of brick-and-half thickness, have the full exposure of the S. and W. winds and rain, so that I feared penetration, and rough-rendered the outer face of wall on those two sides with Portland cement and sand, and then plastered and rough-casted. . . . The above may not help you at all, and if so I shall be sorry, as I like helping lame dogs over stiles, and being so helped myself.”

Webb's thought on this matter of craft practice is well brought out in a letter to the Art Workers' Guild in 1892: “After much indecision I have concluded not to accept the honour. It would be too long a business to tell all the reasons, but the one that has helped me to a decision is that unfortunately I am not a craftsman and I am too old to set about making myself one. I find a large proportion of the members are architects, a number of whom are young enough to become craftsmen and to lift the ‘profession’ out of the slough in which it sticks. Painters have the advantage of being craftsmen already and they

will as times improve be able to work in a broader way than the present demand will allow. The other crafts are numerous and all will, I hope, be able to drop the misleading title of ‘designer.’”

All the glorious building works of the world were wrought by work-masters who had learnt their craft by practice and perfected it by further practice. Now that it is taught that architecture is a matter of recombining on paper features learnt from old styles mixed according to taste, it is not seen that a paper architect is almost as absurd as a paper athlete. There are two ways open to any one who would follow architecture. Webb and his better contemporaries would have said—learn to build; learn other things, too, of course, the multiplication table, for instance, and mechanics, planning, and sanitation; but, above all, learn to build. Be clear about this at the beginning; there are two gates; the building shop and the architectural atelier, and it is difficult to be in two places at one time. There are two ideals, sound, honest human building, or brilliant drawings of exhibition designs.

Mr. Jack says: ‘Houses that he built, beautiful as they are, in no way form the measure of his power; for, quite distinct from his actual performance as an architect, there was in him a most potent quality of silent influence. This influence had always one tendency: it removed “architecture” from the architect’s office to the builder’s yard and the craftsman’s workshop. One remarkable quality was his keen perception of the proper ways in which all kinds of building materials should be used—it was a kind of instinct with him.’

Labour and Pains

We have heard so much of genius and of the ease with which genius works that we are likely to be somewhat

impatient of labour and pains; indeed, a phrase of reproach is 'laboured art'. Webb did not bother about genius, but he was convinced of the need of carefulness and strenuous labour. "There is great danger that students will look on art as a trick to be learnt or found out. Work in any way satisfying can only come of hard pounding." Again and again he returned to the necessity of taking pains "and anybody can do that". Even evidence of care and consideration was so far good. About taking pains he would say that it was all he had been able to do for his art. He had, indeed, trained his powers of observation to an acute point. I once sent him a tiny Kodak print of Watts's bronze "Physical Energy" in Kensington Gardens, and in writing back he said that "under a glass it appears not to have been worked over the surface after casting, and I think it better so".

To W. R. L.

"September 17, 1903.

"The Yorkshire proofs of your journey done by Kodak interested me much. I got out Ordnance maps and found Bainbridge-on-Bain, and it feeding Eure. The Roman road is ideal. . . . Being a little Englander the two Lincoln statues [the Church and Synagogue of the South Porch] consoled me. . . ."

Another time, having lent him Venturi's *History of Italian Art* (vol. iii), on its being returned I found many little slips between the pages with pencilled remarks showing how he had studied the book. "Fig. 11: It seems that *anything* could be done in this style; see also 80. Fig. 35: First true view of this central steeple I've seen. To me 'tis the most skilful composition of its kind—anywhere. Fig. 72: Ah! Fig. 94: One can hardly understand what has gone to make such a thing as this, perfect

in its way. Fig. 95 is a one-er for mysticism. Fig. 110: Is this a solemn piece of work for a saint bishop? Fig. 127: What a figure! Fig. 482: Such a Sicilian perfection with its balance of parts and with next to no overlay; what a refined effort; even Peterborough almost pales. Fig. 485: Inspiration. Fig. 521: Ain't these Joseph carvings out and out dramatical? Fig. 602: Aren't these Gaeta things touching? Fig. 640: These Beneventu doors in detail were new to me, and the subject reliefs beautiful beyond telling. Figs. 770 and 771:!!! Fig. 803: Think over these. Figs. 821 and 822: O my! Fig. 827: What an Annunciation! Figs. 892, etc.: This series of Siena pulpit sculptures surely influenced Michael Angelo. Fig. 897: It never occurred to me to make lintel and cornice like this."

Sound Materials

We owe it to England and the landscape to build in a reverent way with suitable materials. Materials must be used so as to express their essential qualities; these essential qualities are what rhythm is to poetry. This applies as well to decoration as to structure. "Of course the gist of all decorative design is in its hand and glove fitness for the material reception. The very invention depending on facility and adeptness in doing."

Land Love

The root of architecture is in the land, and without love of the land you can do nothing. Morris and Webb beyond any other men I have known, and apart from most, had a deep religious love for England, not a vague abstract love, or possessive pride and patriotism, but affection and even worship for the very earth, trees, fields, animals, ploughs, wagons, and buildings—yes,

and the weather, too; 'there is no bad weather, only different kinds of good weather'. The love was particular and personal—this field, this bend of the river, that building and that. The land was not merely 'nature', it was the land which had been laboured over by the generations of men; buildings were not 'architecture', they were builded history and poetry. Art was not 'taste' but human spirit made visible. As Morris said, 'To criticise Chartres Cathedral is like criticising a geological epoch'. Then there early came a time when they realized that this England of their love was a little land, that its treasure of ancient buildings was limited, that change and destruction were going forward with frightening rapidity and that it could not stand the racket. I remember Webb saying, "Nature would soon cover up the scars, but I can't think the land will ever be grey with old buildings again".

The intensity of Morris's worship of the earth and what it holds is expressed in his description of the old house in 'Nowhere'. 'O me! O me! How I love the earth, and the seasons, and weather, and all things that deal with it, and all that grows out of it, as this has done!' 'The earth and the growth of it and the life of it! If I could but say it or show how I love it!' Passionate acceptance of the fellowship of men; the sacredness of labour, and worship of the earth were items in the belief of these men.

The waking up to a conscious response to Nature and to historical associations and survivals seems to have come about at the end of the eighteenth century—it was probably enough a manifestation of a protective instinct mysteriously aware of what was to happen in the coming machine age. Wordsworth seems first to have seen things in the new way.

Locality and Site

Webb would most carefully relate his building to its neighbourhood both in adjusting it to the site and in taking up local manners of building. These were among the sources of his inspiration and I get the impression from his country houses that it 'came to him' what sort of thing he wished to build on a particular site and in its neighbourhood. This idea was worked out in the office, but the inspiration was always local. He felt the loss of local custom and endeavour and agreed with Morris when telling of some new iron bridge atrocity near Kelmscott one evening at the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings: 'There's hardly a man left in England who dares build a ten-foot bridge over a brook: an engineer is called from London to plank down iron girders.'

The compelling need to use local material is brought out in a letter to Miss Constance Astley, of Arisaig, N.B., 29 November 1882: ". . . If you should fail in getting whin stone of sufficient size to do the memorial from stone got from your own ground, it would seem hardly to the purpose to get that sort of stone from elsewhere—unless it could be got from somewhere near by. Still, I think, in that rude little churchyard, with its ancient ruins standing by, the native stone would look more congruous than any imported stone would; but if the whin stone is not to be come at I think *unpolished* granite would be the next best, though in that case I should have to make a fresh design as the design you have is quite unsuited to the working of granite."

Beyond the general influence of neighbourhood come the particular suggestions of an actual site. This has been dwelt on in the account of Webb's buildings, and I will here only add a passage from a letter of 21 December

1909: “. . . Do urge on the need for mastering the *possibility* of a SITE.”

Purpose and Humanity

Expression of essential quality was also much in his mind. It is a commonplace that buildings should have individual character according to their purpose, but Webb's quality went beyond this. His houses embody houseness; they are homes. All our words are so worn that I must not speak of 'art' or 'poetry', but perhaps what is meant may be suggested by heart, honesty, and humanity—Webb's architecture was Humanity in Building.

The special quality in his work is from the heart of the man. He felt that roofs, chimneys, and walls were sacred. When he designed Morris's coped gravestone he said: "It will be a roof for the old man." Once speaking of a too elegantly designed grate and chimney-piece, he said: "Yes, but it is hardly fit for Holy fire." It was the heart in things made which called to him. On a time returning to London he spoke of how the country touched him "with the old houses like open books lying in the fields".

Directness

Yet another of Webb's thoughts to which he would frequently recur was that all the greatest art preserved some strand of primitive frankness and an element of wonder.

To W. R. L.

"September 17, 1903.

"True, the Gothic between 1200 and 1350 was not 'barbaric,' or rather had not the barbaric element left in it, but between 1150 and 1200 the youthful freshness and strength of what I've called barbaric *is* there; and the very *spring* in the later more refined chevron decoration is to

me a visible sign that 'barbarism' was only partly outgrown and its strength-giving quality backboned the work of the next two centuries. Still how difficult such questions, in their real answering, are! There was heavy-browed 'wonder' built into cathedrals before the wriggings of the 'great worm' had straightened out; and wonder *is*, I feel, an essential of Gothic. Indeed, I'm claiming it should be a primary essential; and only by the Gothic system of multiplication and disposition of parts can 'wonder' be gained (and even in comparatively small buildings, more subtly than in the larger, for these depend on actual size). Do you know the great central doorway under the narthex of the Madeleine at Vezelay? Rooke *père* sent a picture postcard of it. 'Tis an astounding piece of structural and sculptured work, and by good luck not tampered with by the Viollet [le Duc]. I think the sculpture could not be later than the end of the eleventh century; in any case it is barbarically powerful."

"The glut of big things you saw in this round of French delights must have filled you up, however greedy your swallow. I, too, am touched by the eastern apse of St. Quentin—may we call that 'reasonable selection'? Through the lens it looks as if there was fine glass in this apse? The builders were much in love with bows: the main apse, then the ambulatory colonnade, finished with the chapel bows—looking on plan like rose petals—must be astonishingly effective inside. Do not the things in Villars de Honnecourt's book look later than the eastern (apsidal) limb of this church? You must know; I've never seen either of the great soul-filling buildings in this French catalogue of yours—not even Soissons, of which I remember something of delight in a letter of W. M.'s about it when he went with Jenny. True, Solomon was never *much* more in his glory anywhere

than at Rheims. He [the image] do 'swagger' with that left arm of his, and there is much 'side' on the right. . . ."

To W. R. L.

"1903.

"That was a heaven-sent chance (the scaffolding at Wells). You see, 'Heaven helps those who help themselves.' . . . For years back my brain has worked at the 'essentials' of 'Gothic,' and in rummaging amongst architectural history books of building have more or less concluded that all architectures had in some stage of them the 'Gothic' element—that is, the barbaric; which led the builders to express themselves—and probably when at their best—in direct effectiveness, before consciousness of attractive detail. I have seen it in the Greek, strongly before the Parthenon time—so-called archaic; noted it in the early rock-cut temples of India, with pure Buddhist sculptures; also in the earlyish Byzantine work, where the barbaric element again set architecture on its legs. The question to me, then, has been: how far can detail (ornament, structural or otherwise) be carried without losing the massive, direct, and simple qualities of the 'barbaric' saving element of breadth? I take it the answer would be that you *may* overlay simplicity with some gain, and without loss if the addition be not too mechanical—the work of slaves. We have not yet told ourselves how much addition of slave work expression there is, say, in the Parthenon or in fourteenth-century French cathedrals, or in our own fifteenth century ditto."

"J. R. once held ('Seven Lamps'?) that a building wasn't architecture without sculpture and painting—to me a fallacy, on the line of Fergusson. What could have been added to the *original* N. and S. transept ends of St. Alban's without injury? It seems that all depends on

what the ornament is. The early folks painted their surfaces and the Egyptians carved in *very* flat relief, without destroying the breadth of simplicity. Byzantines marbled their surfaces and incised patterns in spandrils. Some literature, too, will carry adjectives without loss of force. To me the whole matter—if rightly done—merely means a difference in kind. The incrustation on Wells west front is broad and simple—only of a different kind to St. Alban's transept. The Italian Lombardic constructional decoration with spandril inlay, &c., like the fronts of the Cathedral at Lucca, do not to my eye destroy the underlying 'barbaric' simplicity of form or surface. Detail, to me, means the sign manual of instinct and imagination, applied only when called for by the object. Here I say a word for that of 'barbaric' (which Wardle would have at no price); it is *not* barbarous, but is the beginning of throwing off fetters on the impulse of imagination, and is *not* licentious as the satiety of the unrestrained is but rather the shyness of simplicity in growth. The licence shown in our poor late 'Decorated' and in much of fourteenth-century French and German work is dull, mechanical, unimaginative. Our almost unique 'perpendicular' has in it often revival of imagination which makes it peculiarly interesting and inimitable; having withal breadth. J. R., in an early lecture, produced a drawing of barbarous inexpression, adding that nothing of worth could come out of it.¹ I remember dissenting, believing that the progress in the arts had grown from some such stocks. The 'Decline and Fall' gave the new life-spring in Byzantium. Possibly the submerging of commerce and general purification of England from luxury might give fresh inspiration to art with us—and the curse of the great Panjandrum may turn out to have

¹ 'Conventional Art' in *The Two Paths*.

been a blessing disguised in shoddy. One can never say when the inventive frog-nation will cease to be the ingenious people of Europe—such vitality is there in that stock. Still, could these French ever forego their lead of other nationalities, and allow Paris to become *le barbare*? Are they not more likely to clap on steam to a 'Gothic revival'—somewhat after the style of Wagnerian music, or as mighty fox-hunters have done to clear too wide a stream, and come down with a splash?"

Gradation

At the same time, modern civilized work must be done with careful balancing of considerations. A letter written to Mr. F. A. White (in the eighties), following a conversation on the statues of London and the Wellington monument at Hyde Park Corner, puts on record, in regard to a particular case, some of his constant thoughts—the need for *Gradation of Parts*, contrast, and of 'shading' different materials together.

"As the statue is necessarily small (comparatively) the thing to be done is to give it scale by contrast. There should be some foil to the size of the main object. Scale might be got in some such way as this: First, to give parts to the pedestal itself and then to give a broad enough base on the ground, and on it to set up the foils. You will probably have noticed that in the statues of horsemen, the pedestal when seen end-on looks very thin, unless made very wide and out of proportion to the horse. To get over this there should be lateral pilasters, as at A A [wide projections in the centre of the sides]. As the bronze of the statue would be darker than the stone, some bronze should be put into the pedestal. The cornice-frieze to the pedestal of Verrochio's Colleoni at Venice has this frieze of bronze, and I noted the effect. I would

make the Cornice C and the panels D [occupying the lateral breaks on the pedestal] of bronze; I would put four shafts at the corners of the plateau [on which the pedestal stands], making the shafts of granite and the capitals and finials of bronze. The finials themselves might represent England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales—symbolising the ashes of the different peoples on which the fame of the great man was built—and to them the national shields might be hung. The arms of Wales *are* to be found, and the Prince of Wales might like to recognise that valiant people by this sign."

As for *Decoration*, he agreed with Morris: 'Why should we trouble to have a pattern of any sort? I for one am dead against it unless the pattern is really beautiful; it is worthless if it is not. . . . Everyone of them must have a distinct idea; some beautiful piece of nature must have pressed itself on our notice so forcibly that we are quite full of it, and can, by submitting ourselves to the rules of art, express our pleasure to others and give them some of the keen delight that we ourselves have felt.' This principle, of course, applied to the higher forms of decoration, and other than this some simple modifications of surface and colour might be allowed as pleasant. Webb, indeed, got much out of simple modes of workmanship, masonry forms rather than carving, frets, and the like. He would insist that flat ornament should usually be "a pattern which turns the white ground into a mosaic-like pattern effective at a distance"—the spaces as well as the forms must come right. His higher decoration was founded directly on fresh study of nature—flowers, foliage, and living creatures.

For himself, Webb could not take refuge in bareness and baldness. He felt that to do this might be calling attention and might seem affected posing and advertising.

A building was not to be noticeable by reason of its bareness nor by its elaboration; it was to be just good. "I never begin to be satisfied until my work looks commonplace." Still, sound building is the first necessity, and restraint is entirely right if it does not pass over into affectation. "Evasionist art" and a "Negationist style" were not final aims, although they might be necessary steps. He would tease me on evasion and negation, and then add: "After all, it's quite right." In no sense, however, did he mean that any named "style" should be imitated. I have heard him speak of his early time as "my Gothic days", and once, on his having to add a wing to a modern house, he remarked: "I'll take the Renaissance out of it." His mind was set on forming a natural mode of modern building. "Common sense is our only ware." Webb in building, like Browning in poetry and Madox Brown in painting, was first of all a realist; but then he sought for the romantic and the poetic in the real.

Invention

Where work is sound, competent and natural there will necessarily be a leaven of Invention keeping it sweet. An architect is properly an experimenter, developer, adapter—an inventor in building, not a supplier by rote of tired and stale grandeurs in the styles. "Oh dear me", says Webb, in a letter given further on, "is there any hope for invention?" And in another place I find the word "design" crossed out and *invention* substituted.

Commonplace and Common Sense

Mr. Jack writes: 'He frequently impressed upon me the value of the Commonplace, and I think this was a keynote of his own development. The first "Clouds" design was very much more individualistic than the

second. I remember one design he did for a house that was never built, wonderfully elaborate and interesting. As the days went on I found he had been using his india-rubber very freely, and he made the remark to me: "Whatever you do, cut out, cut out!" When designing patterns or animal subjects he had not the passionate directness of Morris, but he had what reached as high—a sure visual notion of the thing he wanted and untiring patience in finding his way to it. With unrelenting self-criticism he knew well when he had *not* got it—and so, no matter how plausible the result might be, his india-rubber settled the dispute, and at it again he went—Patience without this quality is a curse to designers. . . . He said that the ability to make picturesque sketches was a fatal gift to an architect. We could sometimes not get him to design the mouldings and things for which he had prepared drawings. We hit on the plan of putting them in ourselves and asking him if they would do—of course they would not do, and he himself immediately set to work. We sometimes ranged bits of rubber along the top! He was particularly fond of designing carpenter's work—so was I—we often had discussions and often got very hot over it—as he said, "like a couple of Clyde gulls." I used to make for this purpose elaborate little sketches of joints and framings, and Webb sometimes giped me for making another "Academy drawing."

In his retirement he went on thinking of and trying to hope for improvement in the art of building. In a letter to me, dated 13th April 1911, he says: "I have thought considerably of the prospect of finding a lift to the good in our business, and have had nothing for the sole of my mind to rest on—save Hope, with the roundest of O's. Truth-teller you are about the best work being done by a negative, anti-scrape." That is, we must begin again

with zero and sense in doing beneficial work like that of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings which is by far the best modern school of building we have.

To W. R. L.

“July 3, 1904.

“I have no doubt whatever as to there being no prospect for coming architecture save in putting all the brains into simple but excellent building, fitting for the climate and other characteristic qualities of this garden-like country. Direct importation of other than such fittingness would—I truly believe—be but a further hindrance to any possible living architecture from the root up. I hold tenaciously that, at all times in England, when there was any art worth considering, by its characteristic qualities it acclimatised its gains from other countries and held its own in all reasonable equality. For instance, I know of no scholarly example of the monumental renaissance to equal St. Paul’s of Wren—which tells what I mean by insularising any imported motives. To my seeing there came a sea-change almost instantly on landing, to any fresh fashion adopted from elsewhere. I would not have had here the grandeur of French wonders at the expense of our own imaginative simplicity, holding, as I do, that the mixed races which we call English had imagination of a refined quality in all the arts when they *lived* at all. Even in our modern make-believers, Professor Cockerell’s gallery building in Oxford expresses what I mean by imagination with graceful simplicity. . . . I say Yes as to a book on ‘Modern Building Aims on Universal Principles: Walls, Arches, Vaults, &c.’ . . . From what I could see in London, while there the other day, of works just done or in the doing, I was beaten down with its hopelessness in the way of invention.”

It must have been mainly for discussion’s sake, but it appears that I had raised the question whether our crafts might be improved by our bringing in small groups of workers from India, Persia, and China to demonstrate what human workmanship was. He answered: “Greek workmen with Greek fire in their heads set a light to such stuff as burned wonderfully well from the sixth century to the fifteenth century in the Western world. Commerce in Europe has set fire to its stinking bituminous train, which is certainly burning up the arts of the East. . . . My most hopeful feeling would be that at all events no harm could be done by introducing some workmen from the East. . . . Would it not be possible to get two or three young art students to go out, say, for a year, and mix with the natives at their crafts in India, Persia, and China, meanwhile finding out the promising fellows to import. . . . Certainly from the East. In a curious way Kipling’s rubbing shoulders with the East did give a kind of lift to the English in the literary line.”

To W. R. L.

“April 8, 1904.

“One may fall back on the half paradox that all styles, at one time in their life, had the Gothic strain in them, and with a ‘sort’ of truth; but W. M. did not care for paradox, and I don’t like it so much as Bernard Shaw! Still, both of us can agree as to the effectiveness, *without* the ‘overlay,’ of the strong-hearted Bentley’s interior of the Westminster church; but can we in these days call for it to be white-washed and left as it is?—which I should rejoice in seeing. . . . The suggestion of going once more to the ‘East’ for inspiration seems to me a perilous thing to set down in a book, *now*. Even Blunt’s Arab horses here, which I fondle with pleasure, are fittingly used as

a change of strain, but the breed in its purity is only fit for the desert. If we could adopt an eastern strain, as Handel did an English strain of music in his German form, well and good; but he was a genius and thieved unblushingly. The Flemings imported here began to transform their work to a fitting mixture with English ways, as the Dutch did with their admirable pottery in giving it a Chinese strain. Of course, there was W. M., who used any 'strain' which came through his wide knowledge of many ways and manners; but he, too, was a genius. He nearly burst himself on seeing his work taken to as the right thing for crazy folk."

Webb was a careful student of current contemporary work in the streets (not in illustrations!), watching buildings go up from the ground; being especially interested in the ground itself and the structural problem. The modern building with which he had most sympathy was the Roman Cathedral at Westminster, in which he saw general ideas and constructive power behind the overlay. He went over the building in progress, and Bentley must have known of his sympathy, for some time before he broke down he called on Webb to know if he might recommend him to be his successor 'if anything happened', but Webb would not consent.

To E. C. L.

"January 11, 1902.

"... An able man's work on a great scale, which work has evidently sapped his strength, and no wonder, more's the pity. My own particular admiration of Bentley's great work rests mainly on the splendid rashness of design in the inter-buttressing of the domes [as seen] looking across the nave; this can hardly be spoiled by the future decorative work; as the coupled arcading which

steadies these emphatic piers will always give remarkable quality to the broad area of the nave."

To W. R. L.

"August 28, 1905.

"... When coming through London, on the way from Winchester, I looked in for an hour on Bentley's church. It touched me sharply, he being gone, that I could not tell him what came over me while looking at the outcome of this last living force of his life's efforts. Here, to speak as a hod-man in that way, Bentley's doubling of the spaces between his width of domed-bays was a triumph. As they stand—these long shanks under the main semicircle—they are the making of the inside effect of the church. Even if the finishing work to be done on the surface be too inferior, it can hardly kill the effect of the great skeleton."

By comparing what I have observed of Webb's work with what I suppose was the drift of his teaching, his more technical aims in architecture, beyond the general bases already discussed, might be suggested, if not fully expressed, under such headings as: Order, Idea, Scheme, Structure; Effectiveness, Emphasis, and Contrast of Big and Small, 'Foils'; Change of Line, Diagonals and Curves; Some Variation of Colour; Purpose and Character in Mouldings—in which, as Mr. Jack says, he thought more of the stone than the section; Expression of Energy; Intellect and Intelligibility; Pleasure to the Worker.

It may, of course, be recognized that the modern city practice of an architect, with its complexities, necessarily tends towards the lawyer's model of dealing with documents and legal precedents, but some way of maintaining contact with the basis of building must be found. Whenever, if ever, the art of building becomes real again it will be refounded on delight in structure, knowledge of

materials, practice of craftsmanship, and the impulse towards experiment and invention. There are two ways in building—sound work based on craft power or “style design”—the Webb way; or the Win-competition-quick way. If any young student should feel confused at the war of voices, I would say—Learn what is taught in the schools while there are schools and you have to go to them; but, as much as you can outside, learn about building and workmanship. The building architect must find his designing first of all on a practical knowledge of a craft; to this he should add mechanics and planning and sanitation, and the rest; but he must begin with some contact with solid materials and actual work. He should direct his mind to structure rather than to style.

Secondly, he must design work suitable for our modern heartless ways of ‘execution’ where he cannot call in special craftsmen and give them their liberty. Thirdly, so far as possible, he must aim at putting all decorative work into the hands of free artists: ‘ornament’ which is not the work of free masters is what Webb called “slavery”.

VIII

WEBB AND OUR HISTORIC MONUMENTS

‘It is sad to think that our children’s children will not be able to see a single genuine ancient building in Europe.’—W. MORRIS, 1878.

IN 1845 Ruskin, aged twenty-six, wrote from Pisa to his father: ‘The wretches have put scaffolding up round the Baptistry, and are putting modern work of the coarsest kind instead of the old decayed marble. I do believe I shall live to see the ruin of everything good and great in the world, and have nothing left to hope for but the fires of judgment to shrivel up the cursed idiocy of mankind.’ In 1848, writing from Abbeville: ‘. . . All the houses more fantastic, more exquisite than ever; alas! not all, for there is not a street without fatal marks of *restoration*. . . I seem born to mourn over what I cannot save.’ Again in 1848–9 he wrote in *Seven Lamps*: ‘Do not let us talk of restoration. The thing is a lie from beginning to end.’¹

Ruskin’s understanding of what was implied by the word restoration passed with the *Seven Lamps* to Morris, who in 1855, writing of a visit to Ely, says: ‘It is so horribly spoilt with well-meant restorations, as they facetiously call them.’ In the same year, writing from France describing the church of Dreux, he tells of ‘a transept very elaborately carved once, now very forlorn and battered, but *Deo gratias* not yet restored’ (Mackail, i. 75). Morris said of the cathedral of Amiens that it was not only the most beautiful, but ‘the kindest and most loving of all

¹ In January 1855 the President of the Society of Antiquaries referred to some proposals which Mr. Ruskin had made to the Society to establish a committee for the preservation of ancient monuments. He was prepared, under conditions, to subscribe £25 a year.