NECESSITY FOR THE MUTUAL CONFORMITY OF HOUSES AND FURNITURE

By George J. Henkels

In speaking of our great progress in science, mechanics and invention, we are apt to assume, that we are far superior to all who have preceded us. We are on the lowest rounds of the ladder of science, whose topmost has been reached thousands of years past. But we are progressing; and have the advantage over the ancients, as we have their masterpieces for models, whilst, with them, it was original conception.

In ancient times a particular characteristic architecture pervaded the whole design of a building. The most general was Greek, Roman and Gothic, and if it was intended to erect a building in either of these styles, the architect was strict in having no intrusion of any other. In modern times, we make a combination, with good effect; as is seen in many of our public buildings such as the Girard Bank, the Custom House and Girard College, in Philadelphia.

As a general rule, the architecture of our houses is of an indescribable order, or disorder, for which it will be necessary, some time, to call a name. The builder, be it a carpenter, bricklayer, or stone-mason, makes a contract to build a house; with certain specifications as to site of front building; with such and such back buildings; height of ceiling in each story; and such kind of materials to be used. The stone-mason is the architect for the foundation; the bricklayer, for the walls; and the carpenter and plasterer for their part; with the general superintendence of the contractor for the whole. The consequence is, that a comfortable looking convenient house is the result. In building such a house, a bricklayer would be considered a fool, if he built up solid walls; and left the carpenter to cut holes through, for windows and doors; but things equally inconsistent are being continually done, when there is no regular architect employed. Our house architecture is essentially too monstrous in the parts of use. That is, three or four-storied brick fronts, with white marble window and doorsills and lintels. Three-storied back buildings, extending almost to the next street, leaving a very small square yard at the rear end of the lot and a long, damp, narrow side-yard, of four to six feet in width, the length of the back building. Thus, row after row is put up in pairs, two back buildings facing each other, with two narrow yards, separated by an eight foot fence, exposing the domestic operations of each family to the other, even though there may be no disposition, in the house of either party, to be inquisitive. The close continuity of the second-story back—which is almost always the family sitting-room—makes it nearly impossible, to avoid seeing what is going on in the next house. There is no other city in the nation, that has so persistently adhered to this plan of building as Philadelphia. Besides the above-mentioned inconveniences, are the distance from the front door to the various stories in the back-building, and the fact that the most desirable part of the house is taken for a parlor, which is the least used of any part of a Philadelphia home.

With an eastern and western exposure, the sun will in summer dry up the moisture in the narrow side-yards; but with a northern exposure, there is but little chance for the sun to operate; and the consequence is green mould (a growth of poisonous fungi) on the wall and brick pavement, much to the injury of the health of the occupants. This occurs to some extent, in the southern exposure; but we have become so accustomed to this, that a damp, unpleasant smell is noticed, but no attempt is made to remedy it.

*This is correct. But, stipulations except, we have known instances where-by mutual understanding, both between families who all, and those who did not visit--the blinds of the two adjoining windows were always kept raised and opened in the evening, and the gas lighted, for visibility and security between the women-folk of the two houses, the men being often absent.—Ed.
In the city of Philadelphia, where room is so abundant—with such easy communication with the suburbs, where ground is plenty and cheap—we should have at least the greatest part of our new houses put up on a lot sufficiently broad to admit of a wide hall, in the centre, on each floor, permitting a free circulation of fresh air, at all times, through the house; and allowing the sun to play freely on the walls and pavements, thus effectually preventing the accumulation of green mould, at any time.

A lot for a double house, with a yard the full width of the house, does not contain any more superficial feet, than that for a single house; and is infinitely preferable.

Our finish for the interior of our houses is also monotonous, the same as the exterior, if not worse. In the exterior, we have the relief of white marble, granite, Pietra dura, brown stone and marble for variety, which, by a little ornamentation, relieves the sameness but in the interior, Philadelphia houses are almost all alike. That is, a long, narrow hall, with the main stairway at the apparent end of it; two doors opening into the parlor, cutting its blank wall into sections, with the doors opening back to the wall, leaving no place for furniture when the door is open wide; and an ugly blank, when the door is closed. On the other side of the parlor, one or two marble mantles which occupy a great part of the wall. In front there are two windows; in the rear usually one, opening on the narrow side-yard. Around these windows the carpenter has attached enormous mouldings—sometimes twelve inches wide—thinking, no doubt, that he is making an elegant job; and that the room, as from his hand, is really finished, not knowing that the cabinet-maker is obliged to spoil the proportion of the furniture, to enable him to avoid those same mouldings; and, that the upholsterer is also obliged to mar the shape of his cornices and drapery, in trying to hide, with the curtains all the wood, which the carpenter had so much trouble to put up.

Where drapery is to be hung, the less woodwork there is around the window, the better the upholsterer can work; and the more graceful the folds of the curtains. A bead three-quarters of an inch to one inch wide, to protect the corner of the plaster, is all that is required. After all, what is the use of the immense frames and mouldings around the doors, unless it is intended to benefit painters, and entail a great amount of extra labor on the domestics?

A narrow wood protection for the plaster, with a frescoed panel down the sides and an ornament of some pretty design, in fresco over the door and window-headers, would certainly be more graceful. In plain houses the paper hanger could accomplish the same effect at a very small expense.

Again, what is the necessity for covering the parlor with immense marble mantles, where the house is heated with hot air or steam. But it is the fashion to have mantles, with a mirror on top of them, reaching to the ceiling; the height of the mantel just allowing a person to see his or her face in the mirror—will all of the upper part serving only to reflect the ceiling all away, as is the usual case. Why not stud the wall out to the chimney jamb, and have no mantel, but only an ornamental heat-register or low-down grate; and reserve the walls for mirrors to the floor; and for furniture and paintings. The amount expended in useless wood-work around windows and doors, likewise in marble mantles, would nearly furnish the window drapery and long mirrors.

The writer, called in, not long since, to furnish a house, was made painfully aware of another one of our monotonies. The house was all doors; there actually being no place for furniture, unless doors were closed up. In fact, the bricklayer and carpenter had made a most convenient house for con-

munication, but not adapted for either comfort, convenience or beauty in furnishing. When a gentleman builds a house for a permanent home, he should first consult the architect, for plans; and refer the architect to some responsible cabinet-maker, for a consultation to arrange spaces for the various articles required in a well-furnished house. This can all be done, without interfering in the least with the architect's plans, or the owner's desire. The moving of a door or the arrangement of a pier, so as to accommodate the proper articles of furniture, may not serve to render the room so handsome unfurnished; but when the proper articles are put in their places, the effect is much better, as a whole, than if the cabinet-maker and upholsterer were restricted—in the proportion of their parts. When the interior of a room is planned, it is as easy to arrange for the necessary articles of furniture, and a proper convenient place for each, as it is to do all by hazard.

Whatever assists to make a home cheerful should be of paramount importance, as the tone, whether cheerful or gloomy, is, to a great extent, the reflex of its surroundings.

There are many other inherent faults in our house architecture, which if dilated on, would unduly protract this article; but enough has been said, to expose prominent faults, and the good sense of the reader will not doubt suggest reforms in other secondary ones.

BUILDING APPLIANCES.

It is strange, that there has been so little added, for ages past, to the necessary facilities for the convenience and comfort of buildings. The scaffolding used by masons and bricklayers is the same rude contrivance to-day, that it was in far distant time. We see, by the early wood-engravings, still extant, that this was the case. The loof, too, is no better than its earliest predecessor. In fact, the various tools are still retained, as of yore; and human invention and art improvement, in such matters, seem to stand still, in deference to the antique ideas which have so thoroughly established pre-emption rights in this field referred to.

Now and then, it is true, some adventurous spirit presumes to try an improvement in some one thing. For instance, some forty years ago, a London master builder, at a great expense, had fitted up for himself a scaffolding, so constructed, as to be capable of being drawn out, in the legs, like the joints of a telescope, and thus he elevated his scaffold tier by tier as he required it. Nobody took the hint; and whether the poor inventor profited by his novel arrangement, or died in despair, history saith not. Some few efforts were made to introduce the telescope joints in interior scaffolding, however; and Mr. Byfield, the eminent artist in papier mâché ornamentation for ceilings, actually used such a contrivance with success. It has since been used by fresco painters; and always found to be a great improvement on the detectable system of "horses."

The method of bracket-scaffolding, by means of triangular brackets secured by pins to putlocks in the walls, is sometimes used; but it is very dangerous, as well as injurious to the green work it bears upon.

The fact is, that this matter of scaffolding is a thing too little thought about; and whereas such neglect, we are at a loss to know. A master builder, expect-