

An exhibition of the architectural drawings, designs for fabrics, stained glass and furniture of C. F. A. Voysey will be held under the auspices of The Architectural Review and B. T. Batsford, Ltd., at the latter's Galleries, 15 North Audley Street, W.1. The private view is on October 2 and the exhibition will remain open until October 17.

FOREWORD.

By Sir Edwin Lutyens.

Two surprising events in the eighties of the last century relative to my early architectural observations were, firstly, the advent of Randolph Caldecot, who found a new simplicity of expression in the buildings he so wittily portrayed, and, secondly, the work of Charles Voysey, who was building—it was evident—what he liked.

Fresh and serene he created that with which you could laugh—a very different thing from much of the moribund building then prevailing which one laughed at—or was it—so long ago it seems that we really cried. The “hearted” shutters, the client’s profile on a bracket, the absence of accepted forms, the long sloping slate-clad roofs, the green frames, the black base, and the black chimney pots,

with the white walls clear and clean! No detail was too small for Voysey’s volatile brain, and it was not so much his originality—though original he was—as his consistency which proved a source of such delight. Simple, old-world forms, moulded to his own passion, as if an old testament had been rewrit in vivid print, bringing to light a renewed vision in turning of its pages, an old world made new and with it, to younger men, of whom I was one, the promise of a more exhilarating sphere of invention. This was Voysey’s achievement—Fashions, as they ever have and ever will do, come and go.

Hail! then, to those men, amongst whom Voysey stands, who give new kindling to the old flames to warm and cheer conviction in a living future.

1874 & After

By C. F. Annesley Voysey.

IN 1874 the architectural profession was divided into two professionally antagonistic bodies. One called itself Gothic and the other Classic, and both were equally contemptuous of the other’s style. Styleism was rife. When a client called for a design the first questions asked were: What style do you want? Next: What period or what particular style? Where is, and what is, the site like, and what the nature of the soil and aspect, were questions of secondary importance. Given the style and the period, books were drawn from the library shelves and approved examples of details were chosen; a chimneypiece or chimney, an oriel, a door, or a window from several books. Such things as these were copied and welded together and like the ingredients of a Christmas pudding equally hard to digest.

Very slowly and almost imperceptibly a revolt began to develop. We must remember that this revolt against styleism and pursuit of utilitarianism was in the womb years before, and was the child of Science and the Prince Consort. The 1851 Exhibition awakened the idea of utility as the basis of Art. All that was necessary for daily life could be, and ought to be, made beautiful. This utilitarian principle began to be put in practice when William Burgess, E. W. Godwin, A. H. Mackmurdo, Bodley and others regarded nothing in or outside a home as too small to deserve their careful consideration. So we find Burgess designing water-taps and hair brushes; Godwin and

Mackmurdo furniture; Bodley, like Pugin, fabrics and wallpapers. Then soon came the Art Workers’ Guild, the aim of which was to bring craftsmen and architects of every description together, to compare their difficulties and explain their several crafts and peculiarities. All of which motives leading to a more and more practical attitude of mind than to a theoretical one. Styles and Conventions were slighted. All this time be it remembered, the world was growing more and more materialistic, less religious and spiritually emotional. Prosperity was in the air. And the classical frame of mind was beginning to be formed.

Norman Shaw was a leading rebel, although still under the influence of the dying “picturesque” of which George Devey was the most extensive practitioner. He worked for the aristocracy from the Queen downwards: and certainly there was no man alive at that time with a bigger domestic practice. Asked by his client to join a house-party, he would make the most fascinating, catch-penny sketches while dressing for dinner and present them during dessert, charming everyone, but getting them worked out by clerks who had to make all detail on the traditional lines of a bastard Jacobean period.

It is very difficult, if not impossible, to point to any one man as the leader of the emancipation from Styleism. It is more likely than not that the practical point of view given by Science strengthened materialism and set fancy free.

It is quite true many architects and many craftsmen were

influenced by Ruskin, also A. H. Mackmurdo, Norman Shaw, and Bodley, but the influence of certain individuals does not necessarily start a revolution. It is the mental atmosphere that makes men of strong Gothic sympathy use the round arch instead of the pointed, which in the writer's experience really happened.

At this same period, Mackmurdo's furniture, first exhibited in the Inventions Exhibition, showed how the machine should be recognized by the designer, and led many in his day to revolt from over-decoration and strive for the straight, simple and plain. And soon there were signs that the rising generation were rebelling against accepted methods and styles *as such*, and were asking: Can we not do without cornices, mouldings and other furbelows? Once set free from the tyranny of convention, what such a frame of mind may lead to, causes many a tear today—as all extremes are bad.

It was by Mackmurdo that the journal entitled "The Hobby-horse" was started, in collaboration with Professor Selwyn Image and P. Horn. For those days it was beautifully got up and printed on good paper, before Morris came on the scene. The ordinary Press were not accustomed to notice artists' work, so "The Hobby-horse" was only ridden by its sympathetic professional brethren, and consequently short-lived as a publication. But the extent of its influence was impossible to measure.

Artists have seldom been conspicuous as great readers. Reading and reflection seem to take a back seat when structural forces are on the warpath—in spite of the fact that reflection is the food of fancy and imagination. Genuine creative genius was sterilized by the competition methods generally adopted; when the assessor's name was known to competitors, who strove to design up or down to the known predilections and prejudices of the assessor.

Individuality was becoming more and more discredited. And the methods adopted by architectural schools that were started, besides killing the pupilage system, led to a stereotyped curriculum, which forced the student to study Classic rather than English Gothic.

Collectivism was beginning to crush individuality. Happily this tendency was not felt by Bodley, Bentley, Brooks, Butterfield or Oldrid Scott, whose work to the students of 1874 and onwards was, like Shaw's, Godwin's, Burgess's and J. D. Sedding's, watched with greedy interest.

Soon after the building of the Law Courts by Edmund Street, it became generally understood that Gothic was a broad principle and did not depend on the imitation of familiar Gothic detail. It was a system of designing from within outwards, in contrast to the Classic, which was designed from without inwards. In other words, the Gothic architect would allow practical requirements of accommodation, plan, aspect and prospect to govern his elevations, while the Classic architect thought first of his façade. Symmetry and balance were tyrannical laws to him. So his plan often had to give way to the elevations.

To explain the fundamental construction of these two different types of mind, namely the Gothic and the Classic, we must recall the fact that the Gothic spire, pinnacle, and pointed arch, like the spearhead, lightning, and angularity, are all associated with ideas of conflict, aspiration and movement. While the dome, the round arch and the sphere, globe or ball are associated with luxury, ease, repose and amusement. Most games are played with balls.

A severe climate favoured the Gothic, while a mild and

sunny one induced the Classic. It is easy then to see how the commercial prosperity and peace, pervading the period we are now considering, down to the commencement of the Great War, led the public to express itself in a Classical, rather than in a Gothic, manner. This tendency was accelerated by the greatly increased facilities for foreign travel.

The fascinating freshness of foreign architecture completely obscured the importance of climatic conditions, and so delicate Classic mouldings found homes in sunless towns. Broad expansive roofs, as Ruskin pointed out, were a pleasant suggestion of protection to a people of a rainy clime, now alas! ignored.

Later on, the schools found axial planning and symmetrical design less complex and varied than Gothic, therefore more easy to teach. The standardization of details was found to save a great deal of trouble and could be easily committed to memory.

The Art Workers' Guild started in 1883 in Norman Shaw's office, and its principles and objects caused the Arts and Crafts Exhibition to exist and flourish. As long as J. D. Sedding, A. H. Mackmurdo and William Morris were, with others, working for crafts as handmaids to architecture, much good work was done.

The last striking instance of the interest in this combination is to be found in the fact that in 1923 when Sir Aston Webb was President of the Royal Academy of Arts. For the first time in the existence of that body, an Arts and Crafts Exhibition was held under its auspices in Burlington House.

The period when Norman Shaw was in full practice was certainly more Gothic than Classic, and lasted in Baillie Scott, Lutyens, and the two Barnsleys, Andrew Prentice, Guy Dawber, Mallows and others, with domestic practice. But very soon after Shaw's time the Classicism of the Georgian type became fashionable and corrupted even the Great Lutyens.

Commercial and public buildings were before domestic architecture in manifesting the feeling of the time, as men of known business ability were chosen to do the work because the business man shunned the artistic crank. All artists being regarded as cranky in a thoroughly materialistic age.

It was early in the 20th century that architecture seems to have been completely divorced from Gothic. Temporary dwelling-places took the place of homes, that is to say, something to go *from* rather than go *to*, were the outcome of the motor-car. And difficulty of finding domestic servants led to the building of flats. Death duties and local councils' powers to interfere with property owners' vested interests, all combined to kill *home* building, and flats, shops and commercial buildings had to be made to pay commercially: their æsthetic qualities being quite unimportant.

Let us, however, sing a *Te Deum* over the fact that in this dark age we had a Bentley, a Giles Scott and a few others producing lovely Gothic work.

When Gothic architecture ceased to be fashionable, away went that lovely quality so often to be seen in the old towns of Holland, where all the houses are different, though sympathetically respecting each other, like gentlemen. Now an angry rivalry, or a deadly dull uniformity, is the dominant feature of our street architecture.

This, indeed, is a commercial age gone game mad.

Facilis est descensus Averni.