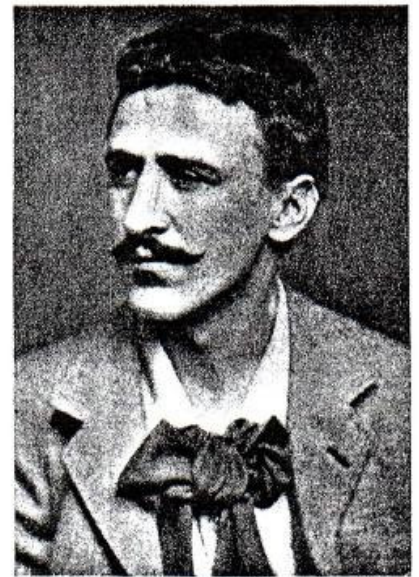


# Scenario for a Human Drama

By P. Morton Shand



1. Charles Rennie Mackintosh

## SYNOPSIS

It is the purpose of this series of articles to bridge the gap that lies between the eighteenth century English house and the modern house. Mr. Shand in doing this is working backwards from the present time to Soane. The following is a short summary of what has been described in the four preceding articles.

Experiment, invention, and the demands of modern life, have completely changed the old methods of construction, and have produced new synthetic materials. It is absurd to impose upon these essentially light materials the essential ponderosity of classical forms.

Towards the end of the last century building technique and design were hopelessly out of date; architects had ceased to plan or construct, and had become specialists in the reproduction of the antique. The war brought the machine into its own. Little more than a decade ago a new architecture appeared, based on a scientific approach to building through structural realism.

Among its pioneers Behrens and Loos were the outstanding figures. Behrens was the first architect to realize the architectural and sociological significance of what nineteenth-century engineers like Eiffel had achieved. His Turbine-erecting Hall for the A.E.G. (1909) was the first modern building. He was the first to preach the Industrialization of Building, and to standardize the office block (1911). Step by step his successive houses cleared the way for the house of today. Loos stripped it of all ornament, *art nouveau* as traditional, and in his House for Dr. Scheu (1912) embodied the first immediate prototype of the modern house, in which he adopted a flat roof, plain walls and set-back upper storeys. We owe it to him that decoration ceased to be the chief concern of architects. Van de Velde was the "wall breaker" who let air and light into rooms and reorganized their planning as living space. Hoffmann cleared up the mess of *art nouveau* by a return to simplified classicism. Behind these four men was an older architect, Otto Wagner, who had purged classical forms of their historical ornamentation, though he substituted for it a sparing contemporary decoration that was the genesis of *art nouveau*. But he consistently respected material, and was the first architect to build with sheet-steel, and to adopt flat roofs for theoretical reasons.

## V. Glasgow Interlude

If there can be a more cruel fate than being that Dostoevskian *humilié et offensé*, a neglected genius, it is to be a tardily rediscovered precursor to whom popular opinion attributes other men's achievements instead of his own. Sweeping claims have been made on behalf of Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868-1928) in England as well as Scotland that are based on little more than the enthusiasm with which Hermann Muthesius championed him in Germany, and the fact that most of his interior designs were exhibited or published on the Continent. In their misapprehension of the fundamental nature of the New Architecture, and therefore of the part Mackintosh actually played in its genesis, zealous partisans have obscured just where they thought to have established his title to fame. It has been repeatedly said in print, more often without either saving qualification or supporting evidence, that Mackintosh was the real founder, the great pioneer, of the whole Modern Movement in architecture. As a Scotsman I should be proud to think

this was true. Unfortunately it is not—or rather, it is true only if we may presume that the pioneer of one movement which led (indirectly in point of impulse, if, as here, directly in point of time) to another, very dissimilar to it, is *ipso facto* the originator of both alike. What Mackintosh was the father of, and what few of his admirers have claimed for him, was something quite different. He was undoubtedly the founder of that revolutionary architectonic formalism that Germans call the *Jugendstil*, the first architect to translate *art nouveau* decorative motifs from graphic into glyptic terms. Many of the most characteristic of these mannerisms were his own invention, though the Munich School had been beforehand with others. In any case, they arose from the same yeast: Aubrey Beardsley's volatile fantasy working on the heavy vernacular dough of the arts and crafts brotherhood. And Aubrey Beardsley, an essentially architectural illustrator, was the by-product of pre-Raphaelism and the linear Japanese aesthetic which Whistler had begun to Europeanize in the 'sixties.

The *Jugendstil* waxed and waned too rapidly in its *cul-de-sac* to know what art-historians label "a period of decay." But from its exhaustion, the fierce mental and mechanical realism of the war, and the grim sociological stimulus to economic building provided by the breaking up of the old capitalistic civilization in the years that followed, the New Architecture was born—which leaves Mackintosh one remove further from having begotten it, or inspired its begetting, than either Loos or Behrens. Mackintosh knew nothing of its birth-pangs, had no share in its midwifery, for, unlike them, he was intellectually neither in nor of that significant transitional phase of reorientation which heralded it. But since, as the earliest Modernist *Innenarchitekt*, he immediately preceded this return to first principles, and so helped, if unwittingly and involuntarily, to prepare the way for it, he built better than he knew. Naked structural truth and the repudiation of all applied ornament are the cardinal canons of the New Architecture; and partly by force of circumstances, but quite as much from choice, Mackintosh was far less of a constructor than a decorator—less even than such declared ornamentalists as Olbrich, Van de Velde and Hoffmann.

To abandon a putative pretension Mackintosh could never have claimed for himself is not to belittle the significance of a man Scotland may well be proud of—but is so, in so far as she is aware of him at all.\*

\* It was only as a result of the educative publicity of the privately organized Mackintosh Memorial Exhibition held at Glasgow in May, 1933, that the Scottish National Portrait Gallery decided to acquire Mr. F. H. Newbery's portrait of Mackintosh, and the Corporation of Glasgow bought two of Mackintosh's water-colours for its Municipal Collection. Towards the end of his life Mackintosh developed into a great and supremely original water-colour painter. Examples like *La Rue du Soleil* evince a timeless modernity and an essentially architectural quality of abstract design such as none of his buildings or furniture approaches.

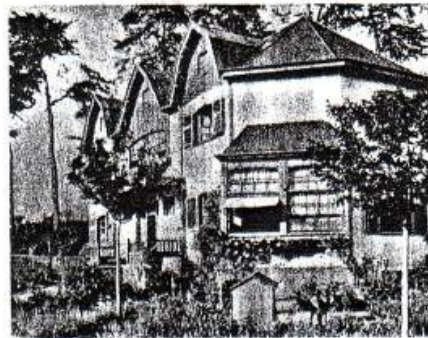
The previous articles were published in the July, August, September, and October issues.



2 (Frank Lloyd Wright's Winslow House, Illinois [1893]), 3 (Van de Velde's own house at Uccle, near Brussels [1895]), and 13 (the ground-floor plan of C. R. Mackintosh's Windyhill, Kilmacolm [1900]), represent early prototypes of the modern house, already definitely untraditional, if still stylistic; and this in spite of being built with traditional methods and materials. 11 (C. R. Mackintosh's Hill House, Helensburgh, [1910]), a combination of picturesqueness and straightforwardness, brings us a little nearer the "machine-à-habiter." But 12 (one of J. F. McIntosh's "Cardean" class 4-6-0 express locomotives [1908]), provides a direct anticipation of modern forms. Between it and the rest of these examples lies a groping phase of trial and error, which unconsciously exhausted the last possible alternative to functionalism. This last alternative was "art nouveau" decoration, inspired by Aubrey Beardsley's linearism. 5 is a section of one of his ink drawings for "Salome," clearly echoed in 6, a tombstone designed by C. R. Mackintosh, and 7 three chairs and a fireplace of his from the Cranston Tea-rooms. Other echoes, just as unmistakable, can be seen in 8 and 9: the "decorative emphasis" of ordinary beam-and-post construction by Van de Velde (Folkwang Museum, Hagen, 1902), and timber structural elements used primarily as vertical decoration in the interior of C. R. Mackintosh's Glasgow Art School (1899). But the exterior of the last building (10)—and still more of 4, Mackintosh's original perspective for Scotland Street School, Glasgow (1904), which was finished by another architect—furnishes us with the earliest outstanding pre-war exemplar of functional fenestration.



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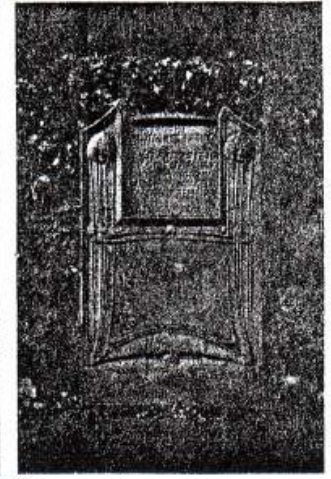
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chiefly in virtue of a misconception. The importance of dissipating it is that it has led to a far more disastrous one: the popular identification of the New Architecture and the Façade Modernism of those who have found "new fronts for old" the most paying kind of commercial eclecticism as one and the same thing. In his zeal to vindicate Mackintosh, Mr. Muirhead Bone has declared that he found his influence so overwhelmingly manifest in the Paris *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs* of 1925 that it only needed a statue of Mackintosh to crown the effect. This is much as though he had said that some recent colony of speculatively-built "modernistic" villas so clearly embodied the principles of Adolf Loos that each ought to be adorned with a medallion bearing his portrait.

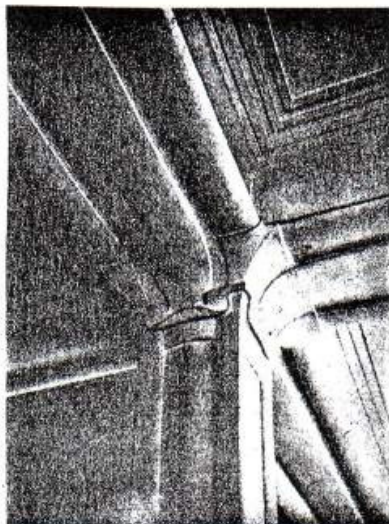
Those who believe that C. R. Mackintosh was the originator of the inornate functional simplicity of modern forms may be referred to the work of a fellow-Glaswegian homonym and contemporary. As the designer of the famous "Dunalairstair" [1896] and "Cardean" [1908], 12, classes for the old Caledonian Railway, John F. McIntosh [1848-1918] ranks as the greatest stylist among locomotive engineers. And since for nearly a hundred years ships and locomotives were almost the only branches of creative design in which our formal tradition continued to develop along the lines

that the eliminative elegance of the Regency Style had so surely traced, this is another way of saying that he was one of the very greatest nineteenth-century architects. To compare the Glasgow Art School with the first, or the Hill House, Helensburgh, with the second of these superlatively lovely types brings instant enlightenment as to which of the two namesakes directly prognosticated the geometric compactness and structural economy of the modern house. J. F. McIntosh started life as a fireman, lost his right arm as an engine-driver in a railway accident at the age of twenty-eight, and rose to be chief locomotive superintendent in 1895. Dozens of his "Dunalairstairs" were built for the State Railways of Belgium, where they undoubtedly helped to inspire that formalized mechanical vision which paved the way for the emergence of the New Architecture. The Mackintoshes are a distinguished clan. There were hereditary Mackintoshes of Mackintosh centuries before a certain Charles of that ilk became the Mackintosh of Waterproofs in 1843. His discovery had implications far beyond clothing, for it pointed the way to the scientific insulation of what very modern architects prefer to call "shelter."

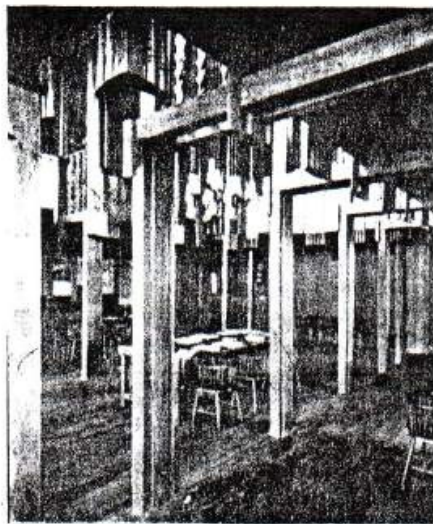
A Mackintosh chair—and nobody who has seen one will easily forget what it is like—might be described as the sort of chair

Beardsley would inevitably have produced if asked to design one, minus what that decade and the next variously deprecated as his "deliberate unpleasantness," "unwholesome morbidity," "stinking decadence" or "downright wickedness." The tombstone illustrated, 6, is pure Beardsley, except that the salacious-satiric quality of his wonderful line has been strait-jacketed into a prim Gothic-Revival respectability. Like Beardsley, Mackintosh was never romantic, but both alike were the creatures of that hyper-aesthetic *maladie de la fin de siècle*. This explains why the Continent regards Mackintosh, Beardsley and Wilde as geniuses mutually complementary to each other—a view which ignores the important consideration that wit in its broader sense was the basis of both Wilde and Beardsley's work. In any case Mackintosh was essentially a shaper of things; and no amount of Beardsley's influence on an ordinary architectural schooling could have made him build as he did, if he had not had in him what in any epoch would have been the makings of an outstanding architect. It is the classic rôle of Scots *perferendum ingenium* to expire in defence of a foredoomed cause, usually without even realizing that it is already standing in its last ditch. In the tenacity with which he clung to his original principles long after they had become superannuated, but in nothing

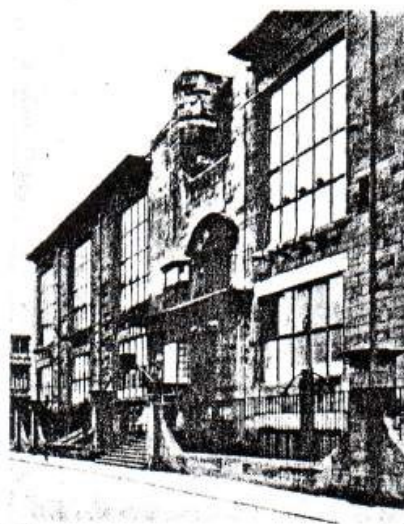




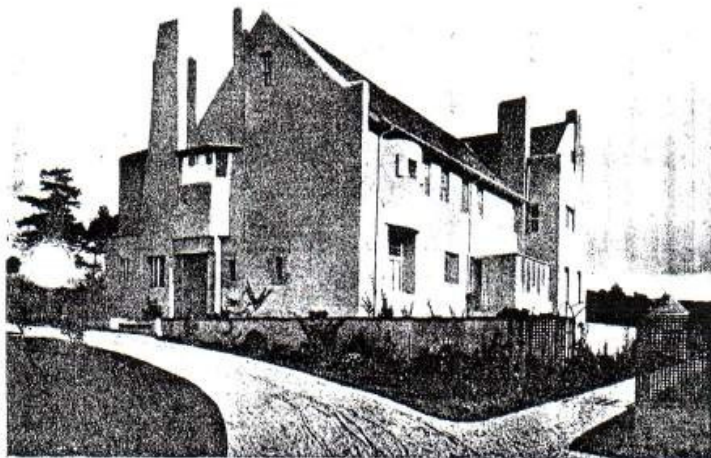
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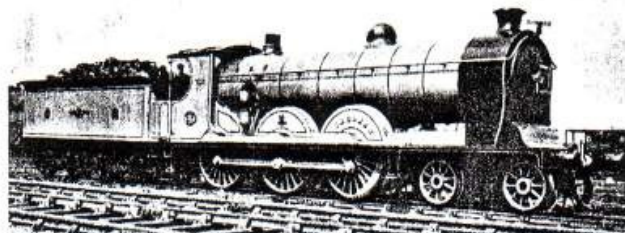
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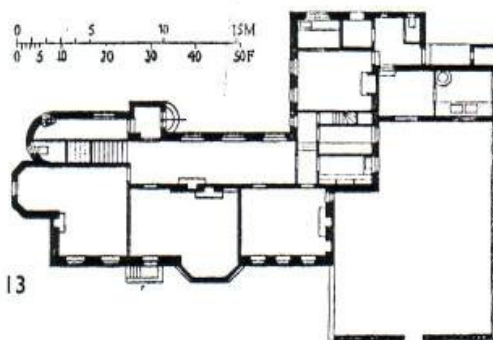
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ch he was a typical Highlander. For, except very superficially in his domestic work, there is no trace of that Scottish quality which is common to Thompson and Playfair, no less than to Adam and Bruce. To that extent, at least, he was a direct precursor of the cosmopolitan formalism of the outstanding architects of our own day. It was Mackintosh's misfortune that he failed to realize that to embody those principles was to exhaust their potentialities; and that the new, and to him alien, interpretation of architecture which now arose, proceeded with inexorable logic from unconscious or subordinate factors in his own achievement. The result was the younger generation of architects either did not know of him, or else under-estimated the very real worth of his contribution. Yet Mackintosh was the first to take his courage in his hands and

have done with those "impossible loyalties," Morris and Philip Webb's remnants of traditionalism, which their timid followers had been far too devout to think of jettisoning. In cutting the Gordian knot he freed construction from historicism and its concomitant, unfunctional ponderosity, the very eliminations on which the New Architecture is based. But it is equally true that he sacrificed half the freedom gained by his enthusiastic reinforcement of Morris's disastrous doctrine of the room as a composite work of art. Though uncritical admirers profess a contrary belief, Mackintosh's use of plain surface was the reflection of a purely ornamental, and in no sense constructional principle. Only when he had to build, and so work in single harness, does he seem to have seen beyond that narrower orbit of his own vision which was his wife's. It would appear to have been

the florid coarseness of her wholly inferior decorative talent and a firm insistence on 'me too' that too often led him into an uxorious ornamental vulgarity. Mackintosh was born and bred in Glasgow, where he lived and worked up to the war. In 1887 he was apprenticed to a local architect, and some two years later he entered the firm of Honeyman and Keppie, of which he became a partner in 1902. But from 1883 to 1894 he also studied continuously at the Glasgow School of Art, which the enlightened direction of Mr. F. H. Newbery was then making an active focus for what were already called "modern tendencies." It was here he won the "Greek" Thompson bursary in 1890 that enabled him to travel abroad. But as he confined his tour to French and Italian cathedral cities it had probably little influence on his subsequent de-



velopment—far less, anyhow, than his marriage. In 1896 "The Four"—Mackintosh, Miss Margaret Macdonald, the fellow art-student whom he subsequently married, and a Mr. and Mrs. MacNair (Mrs. MacNair and Mrs. Mackintosh were sisters)—jointly re-exhibited some *modern-style* furniture at a London exhibition of arts and crafts they had previously shown in Glasgow. The next year is the most important date in Mackintosh's life. In 1897 he was commissioned to decorate the first of the four Cranston Tea Rooms, 7,\* the earliest (though an astonishingly full-fledged) embodiment of "the Mackintosh style"; and work started on the new Glasgow Art School, 9 and 10, which had been the subject of a competition limited to six Glasgow firms in 1894. That Mackintosh (nominally Honeyman and Keppie) won it was almost entirely due to the tenacious support of Mr. Newbery. As the Glasgow Art School was the only important design Mackintosh ever carried out in its entirety, it is by it, his first building, that his work as an architect must stand or fall.

1897! Van de Velde was startling Europe with his celebrated *art-nouveau* Rest-Room in the Dresden Art Exhibition of that year (the first on the Continent to include an Arts and Crafts Section), but had built nothing except his own house at Uccle, 3. Otto Wagner had not begun to emphasize his structural simplifications of Palladio with "contemporary" ornament; Olbrich had not published "*Ideen*," his famous album of *art-nouveau* architectural sketches, and therefore had not yet been invited to embody them in those flowery buildings for the Darmstadt Exhibition of 1901; the Vienna Sezession, though already beginning to break away, had still to be founded; and Loos, Behrens and Hoffmann had not even started their careers. But Frank Lloyd Wright had built the Winslow House, Illinois, in 1893, 2, (which Europe remained in virtual ignorance of for another twenty years); Voysey had already put some of his most characteristic houses behind him; Aubrey Beardsley had been art editor of the *Yellow Book* since 1894; and Obrist, Pankok (and Riemerschmid had produced the first authentic *art-nouveau* decorative designs in 1895 (though it is extremely doubtful whether Mackintosh had either seen or heard of

them). These dates are stressed because so much confusion prevails as to who anticipated whom. Only a few months ago I received a letter from Van de Velde (who, if anyone, might be supposed to know the facts) in which he said that, historically, the all-important question was to determine whether Olbrich first influenced Mackintosh or vice versa!

The first section of the new Art School (which faces Renfrew Street and includes the main entrance) was finished in 1899, but financial difficulties delayed the second (which fronts both Scott and Renfrew Streets) for several years; and it was not till 1909 that the whole building was completed. During the construction of the final section an extra floor was added; but since this is invisible externally it entailed no noteworthy modification of the elevations, which are in all structural and decorative essentials identical with those shown in Mackintosh's original plans of 1894. A big central school is bound to be to some extent what the Germans call a *Hallenbau*; and, compared with even the freest disposition of intercommunicating rooms in a large private house, any fairly wide hall or lofty gallery will always appear more openly and spaciouly planned by reason of its absence of dividing walls and flat confining ceilings. When, as in the Glasgow Art School, this free and open planning for space rather than enclosure is everywhere accentuated by an absolutely unprecedented kind of decoration, the gloss of novelty naturally becomes all the more arresting. Stripped of that decoration, and the unaccustomed pattern of the raftering (traditional materials, wood and stone, are used throughout), the interior reveals itself as certainly by far the most original architectural design of its day, but structurally much behind contemporary engineering practice. Had it been a house and not a school, the liberties taken with the solid opacity of walls would deserve to be described as revolutionary. Time has not subdued that enigmatically "foreign" aspect of the exterior, where plain surface accidentally acquired a wholly new significance for architecture.

Both Mackintosh's houses are later designs, yet there is only a faint echo in either of the open floor-planning of the Art School, or its bold bays of fenestration—though these recur, and still more forthrightly, in the staircase-towers of Scotland Street School, 1904, 4, his best and cleanest work—which Van de Velde reproduced in his own Art School at Weimar (1905). As an architect Mackintosh showed little development. He was too extreme an individualist to be adaptable. He could not learn from experience—his own or others'—and he lacked the powerful co-ordinating intellect, the biological curiosity and industrial prevision of a modern-minded man like Behrens. In short he was altogether "the artist"; and (as his portrait shows), I, even dressed for the part. Analysis of the plans of the houses just mentioned (the only two he completed) discloses a much immaturer

conception of *Raumgestaltung* than earlier houses of Voysey and Baillie Scott; and according to Mr. Newbery it was on Voysey that Mackintosh modelled his domestic work. The severely simple Lowland farmhouse exterior of Windyhill, Kilmacollm (built about 1900, but probably designed considerably earlier), has not a single distinctive Mackintosh touch. In the much larger Hill House, Helensburgh, 11, [1910], which has a rudimentary sun-parlour, he used plain harled rubble walls to modernize Scots Baronial (there is a conically-capped turret in rear) in precisely the same spirit as Voysey had for long been using plain roughcast to modernize English Vernacular. Being more ambitious, and so more amply windowed, it is much more characteristic. Even in a photograph it looks far less of a "garden-city house" than in the slightly schoolroomish perspectives dotted with woolly love-in-the-mist trees Mackintosh affected.

With the exception of Anning Bell, that distressing case of pernicious anaemia of the pre-Raphaelite glands, and Lorimer—who swayed between tinnily romanticized echoes of Mackintosh's Gothic designs and stereotyped academism—Mackintosh had virtually no direct followers in Great Britain. But on the Continent his influence was so immediate and far-reaching that it would be hard to exaggerate it. It was in 1900, the year of his marriage and that famous Paris Exhibition, that he was first invited to exhibit abroad—appropriately enough in the building which Olbrich had just built for the Vienna Sezession. The immediate result was that Fritz Wärndorfer, one of the founders of the *Wiener Werkstätte*, took his band of craftsmen over to England to show them arts and crafts at home. It was probably during Wärndorfer's visit to Glasgow that he commissioned Mackintosh to design the well-known "Room for a Music-Lover." These drawings were published in Darmstadt in 1902—the year of the Turin Exhibition, in which Mackintosh designed (and virtually filled) the Scottish Pavilion. They were followed by his designs for "The House of an Art Lover"—a competition organized by Alexander Koch that was actually won by Baillie Scott—edited by Muthesius, which created a greater sensation than any of his previous work. The visits Mackintosh subsequently paid to Vienna, Budapest, Munich, Dresden, Venice and Moscow to organize exhibitions of his work were a triumphal progress; and everything he showed was eagerly bought up. Mackintosh was the first British architect since Adam to be a name abroad, and the only one who has ever become the rallying point of a Continental school of design. British cultural prestige had never stood higher across the Channel. With much the same authoritarian finality as Herbert Spencer removing his ear-trumpet, Adolf Loos used then to clinch every argument about design by saying, "Well, anyhow, that is how they do it in England!"

\*In point of fact, his friend, George Walton, did quite as much of this work. They did not, however, collaborate as certain rooms were allotted to each. The order of the opening dates of the Cranston Tea Rooms was: 91, Buchanan Street (April, 1898), in which they shared about equally; 114, Argyle Street (1899), in which the bulk of the decoration and furniture was Walton's, but Mackintosh designed the Dutch Kitchen (the prototype of innumerable Miss Hook of Holland cafes); 205, Ingram Street, where Mackintosh added the White Room (1900) and redecorated and refurnished several other rooms at various later dates; and 217, Sauchiehall Street (1904), which was entirely Mackintosh's work. Of these only Ingram Street, the oldest, survives, which Miss Catherine Cranston originally opened in 1885. Since her death it has become "Cooper's." It is interesting that the decorations of Miss Cranston's two London hotels, the Kenilworth and Waverley, should evince something of the same family characteristics as her Glasgow tea-shops.



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## SYNOPSIS

Towards the end of the last century building technique and design were hopelessly out of date. Architects had ceased to plan or construct, and had become specialists in the reproduction of the antique. The war brought the machine into its own. Little more than a decade ago a new architecture appeared, based on a scientific approach to building through structural realities. Behrens and Loos were its outstanding pioneers. Behrens was the first architect to realize the architectural and sociological significance of what nineteenth-century engineers like Eiffel had achieved, and to preach the Industrialization of Building. His Turbine-Erecting Hall for the A.E.G. (1909) was the first modern building. Step by step Behrens cleared the road for the house of today. Loos stripped it of all ornament, *art nouveau* as traditional. The flat roof, plain walls and set-backs by storeys of his House for Dr. Scheu (1912) embodied the first immediate prototype of the modern house. We owe it to him that decoration ceased to be the chief concern of architects. Van de Velde, the "wall breaker," let air and light into rooms and reorganized their planning as living space. By retracing the steps which had led to the exaggerated individualism of *art nouveau* Hoffmann was able to achieve a simplified, semi-modernized classicism. Behind these four men was an older architect, Otto Wagner, who had paved the way for them by purging classical forms of their historical ornamentation.

Mackintosh, very much a reality abroad, has become a sort of myth at home. Though in no sense, as is often claimed, a conscious precursor of functionalism, he was undoubtedly the founder of Continental *art-nouveau* architecture. Far less of a constructor than a decorator, his famous "linearism" was an echo of the same salient characteristic in Aubrey Beardsley's graphic designs. The great service Mackintosh rendered was that he unconsciously prepared the ground for functionalism by exhausting the limited possibilities of the last alternative to it.

## VI. La Machine-à-Habiter to the House of Character

### The Dutch Contribution

**B**EFORE we finish with the Continent, and turn first to the United States, and thereafter almost exclusively to England, another once famous name must be considered; though it is that of an architect whose influence on housing was only indirect. Hendrik Petrus Berlage (1856-1934), the pupil of de Cuypers (in his way a minor Berlage) and the master of Dudok, is an important link in our chain, for the force of his example eventually made Holland the vanguard of the modern movement. Berlage defined his aesthetic as the sovereign

The previous articles were published in the July, August, September, October, and January issues.

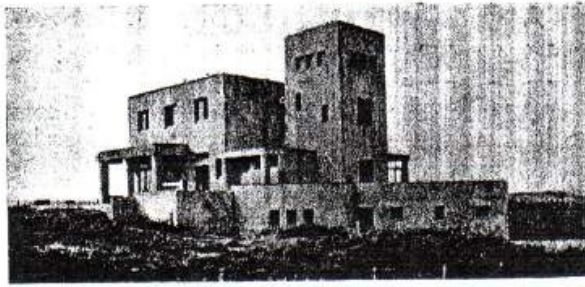
necessity of getting back to the elemental truths of first principles; or, less theoretically, the simplification of architecture beyond the good and evil of tradition by a return to that almost forgotten structural honesty before the basic functions of load and support were hidden away under a mass of parasitic ornament. His half-gothicized brick and iron Amsterdam Bourse (1897-1904), one of the earliest landmarks of Modern Architecture, only partially realized these ideals; though its construction was sufficiently unveiled to encourage a demand for uncompromising structural sincerity in the uprising generation. But the more immediate importance of Berlage is that as a

result of his visit to America in 1912 he made Frank Lloyd Wright's work widely known in Europe.

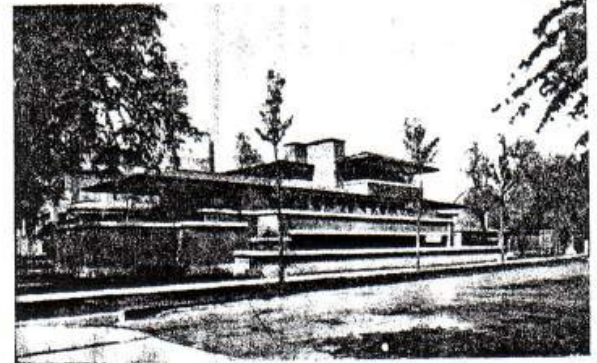
During the war a number of Dutch artists and craftsmen joined together to form a group with the singularly inappropriate title of "Stijl." It included subsequently well-known "left-wing" architects like Oud, Mart Stam, Van Loghem, Van t'Hoff, Jan Wils, and that æsthetic Puritan Rietveld; but its dominating influences were the painter-architect Van Doesburg and the abstract painter Mondriaan. "Stijl's" positive achievement in architecture was slight, but it at least introduced the wholesome discipline of a 'self-denying' anti-representational ordinance derived from Cubist painting. That its purist plasticism soon degenerated into yet another stylistic mannerism was largely the result of the growing ascendancy of Frank Lloyd Wright among its members and emulators. Yet it was the accident of this mannerism's generalization which supplied the vital spark that fused the tentative theoretical beginnings of functionalism into a definite formal aesthetic. Even before the war was over "Stijl" architects were using sliding partitions and windows that let down into the wall like those in railway carriages. They also borrowed freely from naval engineering in intelligent anticipation of Corbusier. Rietveld, who had begun life as a carpenter, planned a house in Utrecht (apparently built rather later), 6, that is the first since Loos's which can unhesitatingly be called ideologically modern. That built in 1916 in the same city by Van t'Hoff [illustrated on page 41 of THE ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW for August 1934] is more hybrid and hesitating. But though a less direct echo of Lloyd Wright than 8 it clearly marks the final transitional type from which can be plainly read that the next stage in evolution will be a still more destylized and impersonal design than Loos's villa for Dr. Scheu. The great service "Stijl" rendered was that it assimilated influences as heterogeneous as Lloyd Wright, Berlage, Loos, Mackintosh, Walton, Voysey, Baillie Scott, Ernest Newton, Ashbee, Perret, Garnier, Sauvage, Wagner, Behrens, Hoffmann, Van de Velde, and Olbrich; and then transmitted the rationalizing doctrine and geometric formalization into which it digested them to Gropius's original Weimar Bauhaus at a time when Germany was still culturally isolated from the rest of Europe.

In France, where progress in structural technique was far more advanced than anywhere else, there was as yet no echo of these Austrian, German and Dutch attempts to reintegrate architecture as construction. Auguste Perret and Tony Garnier were bent on trying to create what was really a modern historical style—vide 10. Paradoxical as it may sound, the revolution reinforced concrete was accomplishing there had very little influence on French architecture. Buildings that were entirely modern as engineering continued to be fronted with the same old historical façades: a "treat-

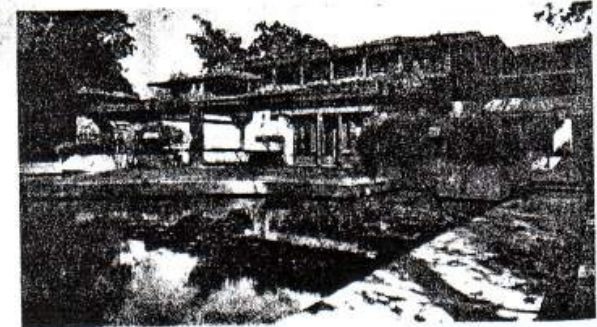




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Two distinct trends in design—the one of a theoretical European school, the other evolved by an intuitive American individualist—started to coalesce in Holland during the war years: a fusion which was the immediate genesis of Functionalism. The former, more or less directly inspired by abstract Cubism in painting, can be seen in its pure form in 1, The Villa Allegonda, at Katwijk (1917), by M. Kamerlingh Onnes. 2, Oak Park, Illinois (1901); 3, The Robie House, Chicago (1906); and 4, The Coonley House, Riverside (1908)—all designed by Frank Lloyd Wright—represent the latter. By the end of the war the Cubist style had begun to develop along lines suggested by marine engineering—5, the Daal en Berg Housing Estate at the Hague (1919), by Jan Wils; 6, a villa in the Prins Hendriklaan at Utrecht, by G. Rietveld; and 7, a villa at Haarlem (1922), by J. B. van Loghem. All show Wright's influence in some degree. In 8, an earlier villa at the Hague (1918), by D. Roosenburg, that influence was still sheer imitation. 9, a house at Pasadena, California (1923), illustrates the later decorative manner of Wright (yet, oddly enough, in a purely Cubist form); and 10 an unconscious and almost contemporary echo of it in Auguste Perret's "new historical style"—a studio-villa in Montparnasse, Paris.

ment" which has since become so common in England that we have only recently grown aware of the absurdity of such servile anachronisms. In one sense these Beaux-Arts shams proved a saving grace, because conscientious stylistic concealment of the new construction helped to keep it free from architectural titivation. At Königgrätz, in Bohemia, however, Josef Gočár had already evinced a premonitory inkling that a new synthetic material like concrete must postulate a wholly traditional aesthetic of its own.

As a licence that meant all things to all men, Modernism inevitably proved too individual and negative an impulse to crystallize into a definite school of design. By 1914 it had almost spent its strength. The outbreak of the war nipped another great traditional revival in the bud.

### The Ideal of Organic Simplicity

There are two Frank Lloyd Wrights—the visionary architectural prophet and the dynamic architectural practitioner—and more

often than not they are at variance with one another, execution belying profession. And in much the same way there are two architects in Lloyd Wright, the local, regional; and the international, universal. Unfortunately Europe blunderingly confused them, which is presumably what Oud meant when he said that Wright's influence on the Continent had been a by no means happy one.

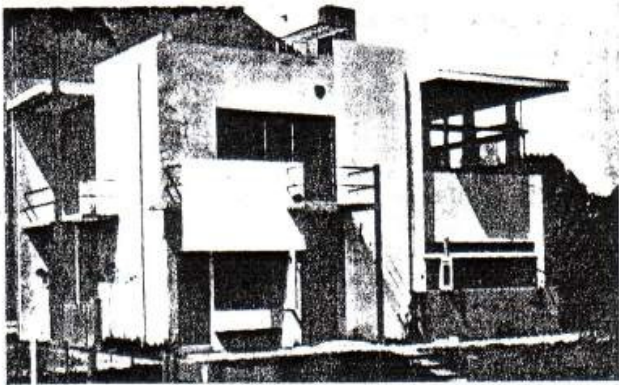
Wright was born in 1869, the son of a clergyman. He has given us a dramatic account of how, as a boy, while watching the building of the Wisconsin State Capitol he witnessed its sudden collapse; and the effect which the spectacle of a fallen length of sham cornice pinning down a wounded workman had on him at a time when his mind was enthralled by Victor Hugo's *Notre Dame*. That made him decide to give up civil engineering and become an architect. For seven years he remained in Chicago articulated to Louis Sullivan, whose domestic work he did out of office hours. Then he began to practice on his own, and soon

became known as the founder of what was variously called "The Dress-Reform House," "Temperance Architecture," and the School of the Middle West. The last seems the best description, for he has always admitted the influence of the Prairie. ("The horizontal line is the line of domesticity" rings curiously like Van de Velde's "fluid, harmonious line.")

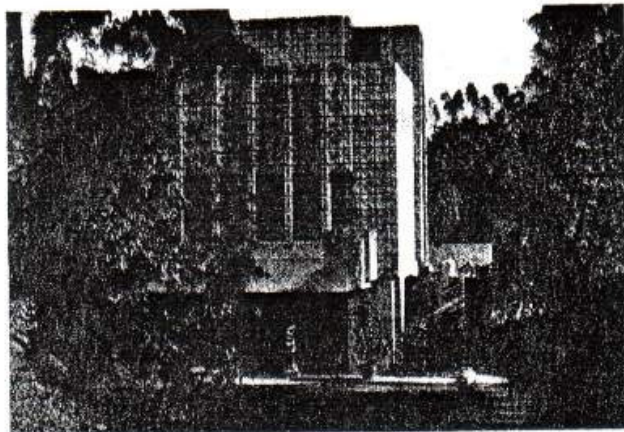
His first independent building, the Winslow House, Illinois [2 in the last issue] ("brick wainscot, modelled freeze, tile roof, stone washes and water-table") dates from 1893. The next year he formulated nine "propositions" for his own guidance, inspired, he tells us, by Carlyle's "the ideal is within thyself, thy condition is but the stuff thou art to shape that same ideal out of."

1. Reduction of the number of rooms and parts in a house to the minimum, so that "light, air and vista could permeate the whole."
2. The association of the building with its site by "extended level planes parallel to the ground," and by keeping the floors off the best part of the site.
3. The remodelling of the then box-like appearance of American rooms by making ceilings, floors and

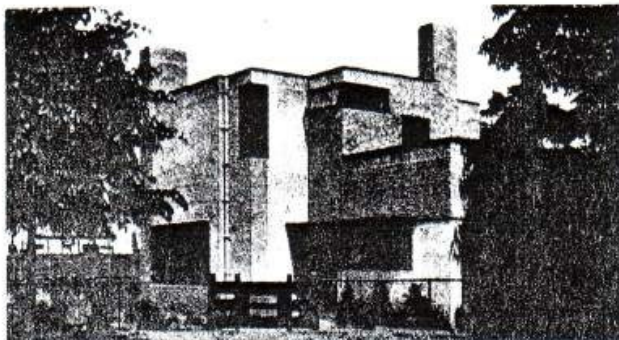




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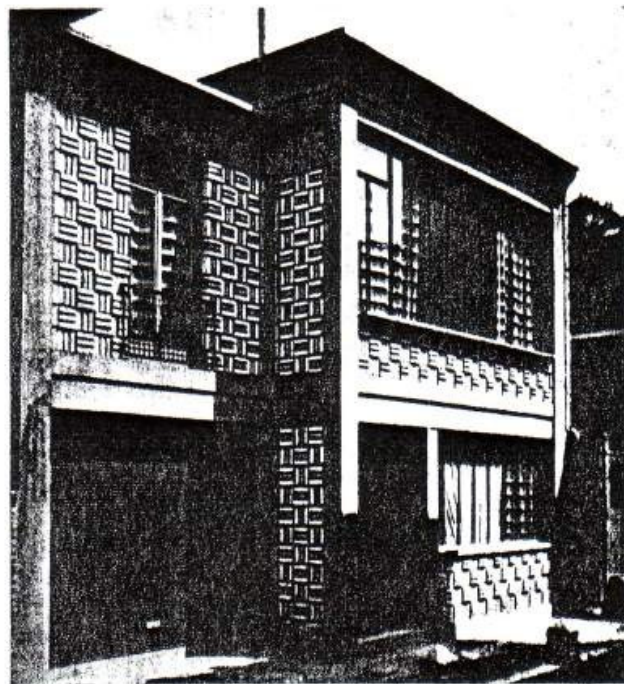
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walls flow into each other with only minor subdivisions; and by the more liberal and human proportions that were rendered possible owing to the 'reduction of structurally wasted space.'

4. The raising of the basement floor above the ground as a "pedestal" by making the foundations into a visible masonry platform ("I liked to see the solidity of a projecting base").

5. The abolition of the kind of windows that were "holes cut in a box," because this was "unplastic."

6. Limitation to a single building material as far as possible.

7. That heating, lighting and plumbing must become "constituent parts of the building."

8. The incorporation in it of furniture (designed on simple rectilinear lines for machine production) as "Organic Architecture."

9. The elimination of the house decorator as being "all curves and efflorescence, if not all period."

At that time all material "looked pretty much alike" once it was worked up. Here, surely, was a democratic enough ideal. Yet he tried to give the exterior of his houses a still more "democratic appearance"—the ornamentation of a building should be constitutional—by making their "grammar" as perfect as possible and simplifying their wall surfaces. (A lot of

this vague, and rather confused, Walt-Whitmanesque talk about democracy recurs in his writings.) "They stood upon their foundations to the eye as well as physically. There was good substantial preparation of the ground." He claimed that all his houses were designed on a unit system "as the pile of a rug is stitched into its warp."

What he aimed at, and what he achieved, was an "indigenous regional architecture," based on "the quiet level" of the flat boundless prairie, in a climate where great extremes of heat and cold, wet and drought prevail. This was the inspiration of that "broad protecting roof shelter," with flat, light-painted soffits, characteristic of his work, which he insisted made the upper rooms (till then simply "sleeping-boxes") "not dark, but delightful," by a glow of reflected light. He stopped his exterior walls at the second-storey eaves "to let the rooms above come through in continuous window series under the broad eaves of a gently-sloping overhanging roof. Here was true enclosure of space." The windows them-

selves be treated frankly as "light-screens."

Wright designed both doors and windows to the human scale, leaving only comfortable head clearance—American houses were even then characterized by many doorless apertures—in accordance with his theory that openings should be "the natural ornamentation of a structure." He also introduced casements opening outwards (English sash-windows being then universal in the United States) as "more natural in use and effect"; and lightened their wooden trim to simplify mass-production.

The first thing to do, Wright felt, was to get rid of the basement and the attic alike. To achieve the former he set the "studs" of the walls inside instead of outside the foundations, so as to leave the necessary support for the outer face; raising up the whole structure on to a plinth-like platform. Speculative builders assured the owners of his houses that their floors would cave into their cellars as a result! Notwithstanding, his plans were appreciated in a country where the servant problem had always been acute,



for they suppressed dozens of doors and partitions. "Interior spaciousness began to dawn, the house became freer as space and more liveable in." But his elevations profoundly shocked æsthetic susceptibilities, although he explained that what he did on the outside of the house "was because of what had happened to its inside."

Wright was also a precursor of the single living-room. As he puts it, "I declared the whole lower floor as one room, with the kitchen cut off as a laboratory (the servants' bedrooms being placed next to it!) "with requirements otherwise sequestered from it, or screened within it, by architectural contrivances." He gave his living-rooms a huge "integral" fireplace instead of yet another "piece of wooden furniture called a mantel." Wright was also the American pioneer of built-in cupboards, which the French had made part of the standard *appartement* plan as early as the end of the eighteenth century.

Among his more important buildings—the list, as the glosses on it are his own—were:—

*Winslow House*, 1893 (to which, though he does not include it, *Oak Park* (1901), 2, ought certainly to be added).

*The Larkin Building*, 1903 (a soap factory): "A conservative recognition of the element of the machine in modern life."

*The University Temple*, 1908: A transitional building in the form of a cast monolith. Here the reinforced-concrete slab is used as a new structural expression "for its own sake as Architecture."

*The Coonley House*, 4, 1908: "The quiet level of the *Prairie* as an influence. The horizontal line as the line of domesticity."

*Taliesin*, *Wisconsin* (1911). His own home.

*Midway Gardens*, *Chicago* (1914).

*Imperial Hotel*, *Tokio* (1916), "a romantic, epic building."

In 1908 Wright read his famous paper on *The Art and Craft of the Machine* at a Chicago institution known as Hull House. His proposals were, of course, voted down by sentimental followers of Morris and Ruskin; and instead of the sort of society he had proposed, they founded one "upon the same old basis as countless other 'art societies' of pounding one's fingers making useless things." In the light of this it seems rather paradoxical that Wright—*un grand homme manqué*, if ever there was one—should have attached so much importance to considerations such as "optimistic v. pessimistic colours," and "Nature's v. ribbon-counter tints." It is this side of him which prepares us for later anomalies like his use of standardized concrete blocks moulded with a uniform Neo-Mayan motif, 9.

It is not easy to assess Wright's contribution to the evolution of the modern house because of the inherent difference between American Middle West and average European conditions. Had he told us less about his often mutually contradictory principles and aims the task would be proportionately simpler. But the trouble with him, as with so many Americans, is an inability

to achieve coherently sustained expression in a now half-foreign language; and a corresponding failure to evolve any better substitute than thinking in German and coercing English into the misty redundancy and agglutinative idiom of Teutonic *Satzbildung*. At times, however, he says magnificent things magnificently, for his is a mind of exceptional vigour; though many of these utterances are at variance with his own work. Only in an Anglo-Saxon country could the greatest architect of his generation remain without honour among his own people. His case lends fresh substance to a common designation which most of us had grown to regard as a sentimental myth.

What, then, are Wright's positive achievements? To start with they are in every case coincident with his earlier career. He helped to carry most previous rationalizing tendencies a step further: free-planning, *Raumgestaltung*, the elimination of ceremonial rooms, logical construction and equipment, built-in fixtures, the acceptance and architectonic control of machine production, and the use of reinforced concrete for things like roof-slabs and cantilevering. Moreover, he gave a powerful stimulus to making the world machine-conscious in the right sense, though it must not be forgotten that the predominant influence on Wright (as on Mackintosh) was Japanese. Against all this must be set his reactionary stylistic mannerisms, and his rooted opposition to standardization; and still more the decorative-structural bias he gave to European functionalism just as it was emerging from theoretical abstractions into rational forms. Oud has explained that though Cubism in Europe arose entirely independently of Wright, there was undoubtedly a latent affinity between them. Plastic three-dimensionality and classical rectangularity were common to both. In Cubism the conscience of architecture spoke for the first time since the Renaissance. The New Architecture, like the new freedom in art and letters, clearly spelt the dissolution of the old cultural world-order. In one sense Wright's work prepared the way for Cubism by smoothing away its initial difficulties. But in another it corrupted its primitive purity. For his dramatic personal mannerisms—like those long horizontal planes he interrupted and then continued again as fresh parallels, 3,—became grafted on to Cubism's abstract groping after a new formalism. As Berlage has pointed out, Wright became obsessed by the protective function of a widely projecting penthouse roof, and so a slave to an essentially Oriental motif, 4. The quality which crystallized into puritan renunciation in Cubism developed as an increasing plastic exuberance in Wright. While he was busy building for "high-life" America, Cubism was no better than a humble, and still all but unknown and disembodied theory. His wealth of fantasy debauched its needy imagination, for Wright was always an artist, and even more of an individualist and a law unto himself than

Van de Velde. Unfortunately, too, the dilettante followers who claimed to be "inspired" by him are usually confused with those who have carried on what was good in his work in a more fruitful and independent spirit. But if, as a pioneer in the use of reinforced concrete—"the cantilever is a free and romantic principle of construction" is a revealing confession—he built roofs that were inaccessible, his magnificent imaginative gifts, and his clear perception of the difference between sentiment and sentimentality, enabled him to achieve volumes in space that are classic in their serenity and owe nothing to striving after the picturesque. Thus the *Barnsdall Residence* at Hollywood is immensely impressive in the serenity of its almost preordained relation to its (certainly luxuriant) natural surroundings. And it achieves this in spite of a wilfully complex eclecticism of exterior decoration—now Roman, now Japanese, now Neo-Mayan, and now "engineer-romantic"—by no means everywhere disciplined into subordination to his bold horizontal masses. Well might Oud say that "the process by which Wright's work came into being remains a perfect mystery to me."

In one respect, and one respect only, America was immensely in advance of Europe: American engineers had evolved the steel-framed multi-floored building in the late eighteen-eighties; and American architects were quick to exploit its more immediate possibilities. Sullivan, Wright's master, in many ways a remarkable architect, was the virtual father of the skyscraper. Thus Wright was the first definitely modern-minded architect to become familiar with a normed spatial unit. And as the first architectural visionary to see a windswept framework of skeleton boxes rising, like a new Tower of Babel in delicately pencilled geometric outline, he was obviously the first to grasp the nature of *Raumgestaltung* with a more immediate and revealing perception than the mind's eye. From the terrific stimulus of contemplating the room thus magically de-walled, he must have divined the immense implications of the wall's eventual supersession by the protraction of visible space without visible physical enclosure; and, further still, that the agency by which this could be realized was likewise machine fabrication of post and beam to exact engineering standards. But it must not be overlooked that in Wright's day the wooden frame-house was the commonest form of dwelling in the United States, and that in many structural essentials it had already become a standardized type. That type, as the earliest examples of American architecture show, was directly derived from timber-framed and barge-boarded English farm and cottage buildings of the sixteenth century. All Wright houses look like frame-construction houses, but thanks to their pronounced horizontalism and broad window-openings they immediately strike the beholder as direct precursors of the modern house.

[To be continued]