

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

ONE of the most certain signs of vitality in the architecture of England to-day is the growing use of sculpture upon important buildings in various parts of the country. In all the greatest periods of their history, architecture and sculpture have gone hand in hand, and the exponents of the one have had a very intimate knowledge of the principles and have been in sympathy with the ideals of the other. Frequently the connection has been much closer than this, and the necessary training and ability have been found in the same artist, first to design the building and afterwards to take mallet and chisel and carve the more important figures with which the structure is adorned.

The position of Phidias with respect to the buildings he embellished was, as is well known, not like that of the modern sculptor who, with very little architectural knowledge, models a figure to certain dimensions given him, but must have been that of a man whose wide experience upon buildings enabled him to hold a position at least equal to that of the architect. The internal evidence provided in the perfect relation established between sculpture and architecture would have been sufficient to proclaim the fact, were it not otherwise known. His was the mind which decided the relief necessary, the type of modelling required, and the best disposition of the masses to obtain the harmonious effect which the final composition presents.

This intimate relation between the two arts is continued in Gothic times, when the mason seems to have been the authority to whom all turned for the solution of problems of construction or of design. The mere fact that he is described as a master-mason or by some other title is

neither here nor there. To a large extent he filled the office both of the sculptor and the architect.

In the Renaissance Period in Italy, the same state of things obtained. The giants of art who flourished in the glorious days of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were brilliant exponents of both sculpture and architecture; even more—they were often past masters of painting as well. So much is this the case, that had the work of Michael Angelo, the most famous of them all, been the work of three separate men—a painter, a sculptor and an architect—each would have been acclaimed a genius in his own particular sphere. It is only a logical outcome of the guiding influence of one master-mind over the planning, design and ornamentation of the building that each harmonises with the other in a marked degree, and that the sculpture is not only good as sculpture, but good as decoration also.

In this connection it should be borne in mind that it is quite possible to have beautiful modelling which may be utterly bad decoration. It is necessary that the sculpture should not only be satisfactory in itself, but should be in sympathy with its surroundings and partake of a similar character.

Although the Parthenon may be one of those masterpieces of the world which can satisfy the critic from any point of attack, yet it will be admitted that the groups of sculpture with which it is adorned are infinitely better as decorative works (for which they were intended) than they can ever appear as studio or museum groups. The peculiar flat surfaces and the square modelling of the detail, both of the drapery and of the figure, are strongly reminiscent of the surrounding architectural forms. If the paradox may be allowed, the sculpture is more architectural than it is sculptural.

It is at first sight somewhat extraordinary that a reference to the totally different groups in Gothic work finds this harmony between the forms of the sculpture and the architecture equally marked. How striking is the similarity between the stiff vertical folds of the drapery on the Gothic figure and the lines of the shafts and mouldings upon pier and pinnacle and vault! They seem to re-echo each other more strongly or more faintly as the architecture or the figure is the more important. It may be taken as an absolute necessity of decorative sculpture that this harmony of form should

exist. The sculptor of to-day is often called upon to provide ornament of various kinds, including the use of the figure, when the design of the building is already complete; even, it may be, after building operations have begun and stones have been placed in position with the boasting already upon them, so that the limits of the enrichment are defined within unalterable boundaries, thus cramping the actual detail of the ornament as well as the imagination of the artist.

It seems a necessity of modern conditions that the work of the sculptor and the architect should be embodied in two different personalities, and since this is so, when the sculptor is designing a group to enrich a building he must for the time being render his ideas and translate his personality into the key adopted by the architect.

When monumental work is in question, because of the more ideal nature of the group and the relative increase in the importance of the sculpture, this subservience to architectural forms is not so necessary; in fact, it is incumbent upon the architect to make his design for pedestal or setting recognise the proximity and requirements of the sculpture, and the detail which he employs will be modified to a great extent. The architecture has no longer to serve commercial needs and the demands of practical construction, but is employed as a foil to plastic forms and as a means of connection between them and the surrounding objects, whether those objects are buildings or the lawns and flowers of the garden.

The exact nature of these surroundings will have a considerable influence upon the design of the pedestal or other architectural portion of the monument. A scheme which would be perfectly suitable in the freedom of a park might be most incongruous in the confines of a city "place" or when subjected to the severe limitations of a street junction.

Sculpture of itself will always possess a great attraction for artistic people. The phrase "the human form divine" which sometimes slips so glibly from the tongue contains a reference to the greatest of all beauties of nature—a beauty which never palls, however insistent it may become; which is never commonplace, even with the greatest of proverbial familiarity. Whether, as a separate entity, the group of sculpture is placed upon a specially-prepared pedestal in the

building ; whether it forms an integral portion of the structure ; or whether it has importance of its own—as in monumental work—it always constitutes a virile centre of interest. It follows, therefore, if it will attract so much attention that a great and beautiful thought should be embodied in the group, and that its forms should bear the closest examination consistent with the purpose in view. If it is in a building, it is necessary that strong expression should be given to the relation of the masses to each other and to their position, and it should form the subject of some quality, incident or fact specially connected with the structure.

Lettering should always be attached giving the subject which the figure represents. It is a great mistake to leave any doubt in the mind of the spectator as to whether the sculptor wishes to convey by his group, for example, “Invention,” “Engineering,” or “Manufacture.” Each could very reasonably be represented by means of a figure holding a model of a piece of machinery, and a similar group would be equally appropriate to all. But if it is distinctly called either one or the other, at once a clue is given to the purpose for which the building exists. In the first instance it would suggest a great technical university, in the second a society numbering among its members many of the most distinguished men of a great profession, and in the third a hive of industry throbbing with the beat of many pistons, the whirring of wheels, and the steady drone of belting. In the same way, when the group is part of a monumental work it should not content itself merely with giving the features of the man, but should in addition tell part of the grand story of his life work.

The inflated importance placed in recent years upon originality of any kind has led to the production of a number of sculptured figures and groups which can only be described as the result of freakish ideas striving, at any cost, to obtain new forms. It is one of the worst phases through which any art can be called upon to pass. In the case of Music and Painting, its influence is bad enough, but in these Arts no structural laws are broken. In the course of time the paintings are destroyed or relegated to secluded positions known only to the few, and by those few rightly ignored. The music may have a fashionable season or two, but it very soon ceases to be played, and, like the painting, becomes merely a matter of historic fact—

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simply a phase which must be studied by that small section of the public who are making music their profession in life.

But sculpture, like architecture, is a concrete art and has structural form, and also, of necessity, a permanence which neither music nor painting possesses. It is generally placed in a specially-prepared, conspicuous position, and in the ordinary course of affairs remains undisturbed for a considerable period. Every effort is made to protect it from possible depredations by man and from the destructive effect of the elements. It is doubly necessary, therefore, that innovations introduced by any individual exponent should have very careful consideration before they receive anything like general adoption. The precision of square outline, of well-defined mass is invaluable, but when the limbs and torso come to be composed of cubical shapes cut sharply into one another surmounted by a rectangular head, the utmost license will not allow that such were these shapes as seen by the sculptor and that the carving is a natural expression of his personality. In some of the modern German sculpture the heads of figures are bent around so that they are at right angles to the body, with the face looking directly downwards—sometimes bent to an even greater angle than this, inclined inwards—an attitude rendered possible by the introduction of a neck about twice as long as the normal. Wild compositions showing figures curling around under great masses of masonry or under oriel windows three stories in height, are equally to be deprecated, as are also figures placed on various portions of buildings without any visible means of support. Such figures are sometimes, apparently suspended in mid-air and attached to the structure by means of drapery or some inevident and mysterious force behind.

All this outrage upon pure form and scholarly treatment for the sake of so-called originality is a false attitude to adopt, either from an artistic or from a practical point of view. If an artist has personality he need never fear that it will remain unexpressed. If the work is natural to himself and carefully studied it cannot help appealing to others. The greater his personality and the more natural his expression, the greater will be this effect, although it may happen, as is only to be expected, that to the man himself the work seems a simple and natural treatment—the inevitable and only possible way of rendering the subject or solving the problem presented.

It is a well-known fact in many things far removed from

Simple expression of personality.

architecture and sculpture that beautiful simplicity is frequently much more costly than the greatest ostentation. So it is that a perfect and original work which yet bears the unmistakable mark of natural expression is infinitely rarer than a rich design obviously produced by an effort. The reason is not far to seek. In the former case, the artist has studied cause and effect so long, so carefully, and with such good result that the right thing to do springs intuitively to his mind. Work such as this which has become accomplished and yet has retained its purity and natural expression is extremely rare and is not produced by the ordinary practitioner in artistic crafts.

Unfortunately the ordinary student goes through his training noting a good point here and a bad one there, until, having unconsciously separated a certain amount of wheat from the chaff, reserved a little good from the one and taken warning from the other, he ultimately reaches some passable level of skill himself. But it is only a mediocre level after all. It is not so high as it ought to be, and until all artists study upon logical lines with definite aim they cannot hope to see English sculpture and English architecture foremost among that of the countries of the world.

It must of course be conceded that one man cannot give knowledge to another, possibly even he cannot do more than make a few general assertions, yet the careful examination of all available examples must reveal certain more or less definite facts which will act as a basis for individual study and save a large amount of that fruitless search for useful information which has such deadly effect upon the energy and nerves of many a life-long student.

With this end in view the author has collected examples of the various features under discussion, classified them, and from their examination made deductions of certain facts which seem to be established.

As far as possible, mere personal assertion has been avoided as serving no useful end, and practically every statement made can be upheld by an existing example. For all this, it is not contended for an instant that the treatments here suggested are the only ones possible—in fact, during the course of detailed investigation into the subject even more convincing proof has been found, if such were needed, that an apparently hopeless feature can be turned into a design of the greatest brilliance if the correct way of handling it can be found.

But although an endeavour has been made to avoid dogmatic assertion, it is inevitable that personal individuality should have governed the choice of examples and directed the conclusions which are drawn from their study. It is hoped that readers will take the expression of these views as a sincere attempt to improve the standard and purity of sculpture on buildings and the design of monuments, and condone any offence to their personal feelings. Reference has been made to many examples of work executed in other countries, not because they are necessarily better than those in our own, but because they contain new thoughts, suggestions and ideas, which, grafted on to those already in existence, may help to widen the outlook of the artist and give him a greater range of treatment than he before possessed. Lack of imagination seems to have been rather a fault during the last decade and it is very necessary that it should be remedied without delay.

Both France and Germany have recently produced some extremely interesting work showing very versatile treatment in composition and detail, and the study of the examples from these countries and from Belgium will reveal a large amount of very interesting material.

The scholarship of the modern American is another notable feature, and shows how a systematic study of ancient examples at least prevents the production of really bad work. It leads to restraint and consideration in the use of ornament, and tends to cause the arts of sculpture and architecture to progress upon particularly sane and useful lines. Most of the best work now being produced in the United States shows evidence of most careful thought and accurate proportion. The placing of decorative sculpture is frequently excellent and the detail almost above reproach. The situation of monuments is receiving careful attention and the haphazard positions which have ruined the possibility of proper appreciation in many notable instances should be eliminated in the future.

The various chapters have been carefully divided into groups and sub-headings to facilitate reference, and overlapping has been avoided as far as possible. Some small amount was in places inevitable, but it is hoped that where this occurs the marginal reference will make its position clear and prevent confusion.

Modern
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Germany.

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CHAPTER II

THE TREATMENT AND PLACING OF SCULPTURE IN THE HISTORIC PERIODS

THE extraordinary accuracy of the reflection of national characteristics shown in the various historic styles of architecture must always have a great fascination for the artist whose studies take him beyond the bare facts of history.

This accuracy is found no less in the ornament, the sculpture or the monument than it is in the disposition of the parts of a building or the treatment of its façade. It is, in fact, possible that the individual piece of ornament or group of sculpture, being smaller, is more fully under the control of its creator and may reflect local variations and individual temperaments to an extent impossible with the great mass of the architecture.

The general forms and positions adopted for particular features were dictated by the aims of the artist for the time being. Thus, in Egyptian art are found either a vast series of figures employed in such a manner as to instruct the people and portray to them the great truths taught by religion, or colossal sculptured figures of kings, which serve to show the glory and veneration accorded to the deified monarch after his decease.

In Greece it may be said that neither of these considerations had any place. Greek sculpture emanated from a pure desire to produce perfected types of human physical beauty, and the whole trend of Greek design is towards that end. The portrayal of myths is sometimes indulged in, it is true, but it is more a portrayal of fancy and has not the definite and serious instructive purpose of Egyptian work.

Some of these points will be touched upon in each division to show how the thoughts, aims and purpose of each Period dictated the forms which the sculpture should adopt. The degree of perfection attained depended upon the development of the people

CH. II] HISTORIC PERIODS—EGYPTIAN 9

artistically and socially; the extent of learning; the appreciation and support which the arts received; besides being affected by wars and disturbances which often had no connection, in the first place, with the peoples whose art they were eventually to influence.

There is one great and essential difference between the development of most of the styles previous to the Renaissance and those which developed from it. In the early civilizations, owing to internal seclusion and lack of travel, there was, broadly speaking, only one possible pathway open to the artist, and that was to build or to carve in the traditional style. After the Renaissance this limitation of style began to disappear and successful design became much more a matter of individual genius.

The architecture and the sculpture of the historic styles, and also those of foreign countries, are at the present day available to the student in a far more complete manner than has ever been the case before. The age of blind tradition has gone, but while the influence of tradition cannot ever be absent, conscious selection and definite learning have become rivals with it in importance, and if the work of contemporary sculptors and architects is to rival the masterpieces of antiquity, it can only be accomplished by the exercise of these qualities of judgment and scholarship.

An historic survey, however, reveals other and equally valuable material. In the styles of antiquity are found prototypes of many features employed in modern work, and these prototypes are often of far more value to the imaginative man than are the completed products of contemporary minds. In the prototype he can see the germ of an idea quite undeveloped, quite foreign to the requirements of the moment, but in such a condition that his mind may seize upon it and weave around it an entirely new conception.

Each country, also, has developed monumental forms which have in many cases remained untouched by later civilizations and so, by turning to each style or period, suggestions and new forms are revealed which may have possibilities for future use.

Egyptian Period, B.C. 4777—30.

The earliest civilization whose work has directly affected modern art is that of Egypt, and many qualities found in Egyptian work have a counterpart in modern life. The simplicity,

directness and conservative qualities which are stamped indelibly upon everything the Egyptian did are also characteristics of the English people, and it follows that at times the work wants but little transposition before it is ready for use. Many of the forms used show a strength of treatment coupled with fine restraint which gives them an almost majestic character.

The low relief ornament and figures of the temple front and elsewhere suggest that richness and texture might be gained in certain places by low bas-relief carving introduced without disturbing the breadth of the architecture. At the other extreme are the colossal figures which sometimes adorned the spaces between the doorways. Such a group of openings as that presented by the theatre-front might form the field for decoration upon similar lines.

The composition of the winged globe and the vulture with outstretched wings frequently employed over an opening is of itself an excellent piece of detail, the high relief in the centre making a brilliant focal point which is surrounded by the low richness of the other carving. Many birds and animals besides the vulture received most decorative treatment, and special mention may be made of the sphinx and the hawk.

Lettering formed an important part in the decorative scheme, but while inscriptions of enormous length would never now be used, yet necessary directions, names and titles, might often be made part of the ornamentation of the structure to its great advantage.

The custom of placing obelisks in front of the pylons of the temple is worthy of attention. The great mass of masonry in the pylon, which might otherwise have passed unnoticed, is forced into prominence by the juxtaposition of the thin and delicate outline of the obelisk, while this in itself receives the utmost value by contrast with the unbroken wall-surface behind.

In addition to its decorative value, the obelisk is a most valuable monumental form. It will always have a distinction of its own and should be employed in monumental schemes far more often than it is at present. Reference to some successful modern examples is made in Chapter VI.

The pyramid, which, as used in Egypt, upon a large scale, is one of the most wasteful monumental structures ever invented by man, might yet, in small schemes, be a valuable feature, and its claims are at any rate worth consideration.