The Builder.

No. CCCXXXVII.

SATURDAY, JULY 21, 1849.

THE Institute of Architects terminated the session on the 16th instant, with a paper from the president, Earl de Grey, and a very full room to listen to it. Before referring to this, however, and offering a word to the council at parting, we must look back to the previous meeting (held on the 2nd), when a paper was read by Professor Cockerell, called "On Style in Architecture," which excited considerable interest,* not because the line of argument adopted has never been taken before, but because being now pronounced "from the chair," it comes to the ears of the world with greater weight, and will strengthen and support timid minds who think with him, but feared to rebel alone.

Mr. Cockerell commenced by denouncing "copyism," the choice of the day, and the Babel it had produced,—alluding with regret to the latitude and license as to the choice of style which are not only now permitted, but professed. Art, he said, must degenerate and sink, unless upheld by principles. Up to our own time architecture had pretended to be an impress of the age. As intensity of character is commonly distinguished in society by a peculiar aspect, habit, or bearing, so should the great national works of a people be distinguished in the pages of time. The architect, therefore, who limits his ambition to the reproduction of an antique model, carries a lie in his hand; he shows himself to posterity as a renegade to his country and his age; he is false to history, for his aim would seem to be to deceive posterity and to perpetuate anachronisms; he confesses his incapacity to delineate his own times, and shrinks from the exhibition of them, as if knowing their unworthiness. As well might the popular writer insist on the use of the style of Bede or Spenser, and the obsolete language of Wickliffe and Wykeham, as that the architect should absolutely reproduce the form and character of taste in that period; and if Art means anything, and we assume to read its language, the one proposition is certainly not more ridiculous than the other. This anomaly of styles, he continued, is not confined to England: Paris and Munich are equally open to the reproach. In speculating on the latent causes of the vicious system of copying without any attempt at modification, the professor said, that although the mere fashion of public opinion always influences Art, as it does everything else, yet he thought much of the evil might be attributed to the want of an enlightened, searching, and generous criticism, such as existed in the beginning and to the end of the last century, from Boileau and Pope to Payne Knight, Alison, and others. He especially drew attention to the fact that, during the last thirty years, of devotional buildings in which upwards of 1,400 cheap churches of England have been erected by the zeal of churchmen, not one of that learned body (as in the middle ages) has produced a critical work on style, as adapted to our ritual, to guide architects. They have changed their "building regulations" every five or six years, and have waived all consistency; and they seem to have been satisfied in raising "folds" in any way for the wandering flock. Others had attributed the present state of architecture to a cheap press, which had made architectural knowledge secondary to antiquarian gossip. The decline of the drama—that mirror in which the state even of the arts was wont to be reflected—has not been without its effect; and it is worthy of remark, said the Professor, that when the drama has flourished, so have the sister Fine Arts, especially architecture. Some ascribe the decline to the conceit of "Young England," which has placed the classical at a discount for the elevation of the mediæval. The professor referred to Mr. Fergusson and to Mr. Ruskin (without naming them),—the first as the advocate of revolution, the second, of chains, and gave some long extracts from their works. Our only chance of retrieval, the reader thought, was to adopt *one* style, and use that alone. One of the great faults committed by architects was their allowing all logical consistency of feeling, all regularity, harmony, and conformity, enjoined by the first principles of sound sense and artistic composition, to be sacrificed *to a pedantic display of our universal knowledge of historical styles and dates*, and the trivial conceit of a dramatic reproduction to the very life (in the absence of the theatre itself) of the several periods they represent. Again, we find them preferring the ornaments, the rhetoric, so to speak, to the logic which is its only just foundation. This is mere pedantry and affectation. Such a spirit will not do in the war of the camp or of politics, at the bar, or in engineering. In music it is thought abominable. Why, then, should it be tolerated in the serious and responsible art of architecture? Nature is never illogical,—for her rhetoric is the mere appendage and the natural consequence of her use and purpose. How often do we find the young architect, fired with the beauty of the classic column and entablature, of the portico and the pediment, introducing them where their unfitness actually destroys the very beauty he is so anxious to display! The column carries nothing; it is carried. It is from this false principle that we have churches on a Roman-Catholic plan adapted to a Protestant Ritual,—buttressed walls with tie-beam roofs, belfry towers without bells, and all the quackery of sedilia, piscina, &c., where they are without use or purpose. The rigid adherence to Palladian or Italian example and dimensions in designing masonic architecture, without the slightest allowance for the growth of modern scantling,—the glazing of windows in Elizabethan or "early domestic" buildings with quarré glass, in bits of 4 inches square, in preference to the splendid and cheap plates of the present day, each of which would fill a window,—all this results from that mania for imitation which, far from showing progress in Art, is disgraceful retrogression. During the Greek mania, we built houses fit for the immortal Gods, and, —— no others. Amidst the difficulty we seek for aid,—in the darkness we are looking for light. Objections without a remedy are useless, and yet if we look to the works of the objectors who have recently written, we shall not find any mode of improvement pointed out. We want a judgment clear of fashion and caprice, founded on reason. Architecture, it must always be remembered, is not merely a fine art, but a useful art. Fortunately *science* is always advancing. An architectural work is a contrivance for a certain end. Good architecture can arise only from a sound understanding of the structure. New ideas are scarce, few men have more than one, on which they may trade all their life. Knowledge of the structure and deep consideration of the materials are the right foundation of our art. As Gothic groining grew out of Roman vaulting, so will other changes come,—we must wait. It is in earnestness of purpose that we must look for what is called genius for fitness, novelty, and beauty. Genius, so called, is but the more strenuous attention to the means presented to our faculties by a closer criticism—by greater diligence in the artist—by concurrent efforts, liberality, and patronage—and, above all, by a field to work in, offered by the public. Until these conditions are presented, we shall of course have imitation: that ready evasion of the most difficult and painful of all labour—the labour of thought. If the prize and occasion be mean, the enterprising and the powerful mind will take another career, leaving those pursuits to second and third-rate minds. The wise architect, while he admits the whole power of association in the effects and influence of his art—while he sanctifies his work with archaisms, and bends in some degree to fashions—still seeks to embody the spirit of the actual times as well as that of antiquity, engrafting the useful powers of growing science and the recent graces of convenience with a certain reserve; and thus he fulfils the great purpose of his office, captivates all observers by the production of things new and old. Further, he should remember always the immortal words of Schiller—

> The artist is the child of his time
> Happy for him if he is not its pupil.
> Happier still if not its favourite.

Present powers of trabeation should be considered in designing buildings. Except for ecclesiastical buildings, he thought the pointed style should not be used, and in these the plan should be adapted to our ritual. We are of classic tutelage, and the style of Greece and Rome would best meet modern requirements. The professor concluded by urging architects to be true to themselves; to remember that they are masters as well as servants to the public; and that they should, without pedantry, investigate and disseminate good principles, and, remembering the influence of their art for good, exercise a wholesome discretion.

Mr. Donaldson said he was desirous to follow out Mr. Cockerell's idea as to the progress towards a new style.* To have a new conception, there must be something to originate it. Amongst the ancients the impulse is seen to be some new material or fresh discovery in science. It was so with the Egyptians, the Greeks, and the Romans. Even the latter, when they wanted to cover in larger spaces, originated a new style. In Gothic architecture the changes were purely of construction. At the present time we should examine what the requirements are, and study the best means of satisfying them. A master-mind will presently arise to blend and amalgamate the whole into unity. A new style will come, if liberally met: novelties grow by degrees. It is to be regretted that public criticism is for the most part exercised by men who have done nothing themselves. Let the artist pursue the right

* At the same meeting Mr. J. P. Wadmore communicated "A short Account of the Cathedral of St. Peter's, Leon, in the Republic of Nicaragua, Central America, by Mr. J. Foster, British Consul to the Republic," and presented an engraving of the building from a drawing by himself.

* A view long since put forward and often urged by us.