

## Hubert G. Ripley

BY LOUIS LA BEAUME

**B**OSTON in the nineties was still a place apart; with a background, a flavor and an atmosphere peculiar unto itself. Its air was still charged with the fragrance of its immediate past, and even a remoter past to which it was attuned in sympathy. Boston gloried in its right to be called the Athens of America, and even preened itself when outlanders referred to it as a state of mind. For it was indeed a state of mind. It was the capital city of American letters and knew no reason why it should not become the capital of American art and architecture. The nation was growing rich and strong and many influences were preparing it for a more intelligent appreciation of the value of the fine arts.

The dominating personality of Richardson had left its imprint on the local scene. Charles Eliot Norton was expounding his aesthetic credo at Harvard, and the Architectural Department of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology seemed firmly established. The town was vibrant with architectural activity and enthusiasm though there were not as yet many buildings that exceeded the spire of the Park Street Church in height, or obscured the outline of Bullfinch's gilded dome. The aspect of Beacon Hill hadn't changed much in half a century, and people walked across the Common to their work. The streets bordering the Common and the Public Gardens were straight and spacious, but other streets still followed the old cow paths blissfully unmindful of the incipient science of city planning. The automobile had not yet appeared to exert its influence on modern design, or debase the nobler uses of alcohol.

There were dozens of offices busily engaged in the designing of all sorts of projects, city and country houses, churches, libraries and town halls for the pleasant surrounding villages. Many men who had served their apprenticeship in the old Richardson atelier at Brookline were now masters of their own destiny, and others graduating from Tech or flocking in from lesser places made a sizeable and joyous group. Robert Andrews, Herbert Jaques, Arthur

Cabot, William Austin, George Shepley, Charles Coolidge and Robert Peabody were among the Richardsonian offspring. Young Bertram Goodhue, scarcely out of his 'teens, had come over from New York to join the only slightly more mature Cram in revitalizing our ecclesiastical architecture. Edmund Wheelwright, with the help of Charles Maginnis, was building lovely schools; and Clipston Sturgis, Howard Walker, William Rantoul, Arthur Little, William Emerson, and countless others were all performing at the top of their bent—that is to say, quite brilliantly. Francis Bacon, recently returned from Greece with a portfolio of beautiful sketches, was designing furniture, while his brother Henry was contributing to the growing fame of McKim, Mead & White, as was Magonigle after he had, in his turn, won the "Rotch."

It was into this stimulating environment that the youthful Ripley was plunged shortly after his graduation from the M. I. T. in 1890. Because of his phenomenal skill in draftsmanship while yet a student, he had been induced to spend some months with Charles B. Atwood, Chief of Design for the Columbian Exposition at Chicago. Here his skill was matched against such adepts as Julius Harder, Albert Randolph Ross, Louis Mullgardt, and other virtuosi. His beautiful pen and ink drawings of the White City were widely published and admired. But as a New Englander his heart was in Boston, and to Boston he returned to marry and live happily ever after. He found a congenial niche in the busy office of Peabody & Stearns where for a number of years he presided as the right hand of Mr. Peabody in design.

Though healthy rivalries were inevitable the practice of architecture in those days was animated by a comforting degree of cohesion and camaraderie. Naturally the older men, as befitted their dignity and responsibilities, grouped themselves together in the Boston Society of Architects. The youngsters pursued their discussions and their studies, their relaxations and their revelries in the Architectural Club then housed in Tremont Place back of the Granary Burying Ground. Both groups overlapped to some extent and both contained an unusual num-

Hubert G. Ripley (1869-1942). Became a member of The American Institute of Architects in 1915 and a Fellow in 1926.

ber of talented, able and scholarly men. All of them worked and played with gusto, and all looked upon life as good.

Within the Architectural Club a smaller Club known as the P. D.'s flourished. It was composed of an especially versatile group, as adept in the arts of the cuisine, the refinements of potation, and the metrical delights of poetry, as they were skillful with brush, pencil, triangle and T-square. Ripley and Tim Walsh were the leading spirits of this band, and neither ever lost their youthful zest for convivial and frolicsome companionship though both were able to assume a becoming dignity and gravity when the occasion demanded.

It was against this background and in these surroundings that the spirit of Hubert Ripley flowered, and it is as a member of this brilliant galaxy that he would like to be remembered. He was a humanist in the best sense of the word, perhaps in the old Florentine sense. He became mentor, guide, philosopher and friend to countless younger men eager to savour the richness of life and taste its fullness. He looked on the world with a kindly and understanding eye and all that he saw was grist for his mill, to be digested and translated through brush, pencil or pen, or through brick and stone into another beauty. A great reader, his life was further extended through the experiences of other men; and his own writings were ornamented by allusion, and pitted with mock quotations and whimsical footnotes slyly contrived to drive home a point or explode a fallacy. Tolerant of the opinions and generous in the praise of the accomplishments of others, his native sincerity kept him immune from the influence of callow sophistry.

He practised his art as a gentleman should, never confusing his professional ideals and obligations with commercial advantage. In this practice he was long associated with Addison LeBoutillier.

Throughout the changing years Hubert Ripley's devotion to the Muse of Architecture never faltered. His many-sided talent and his gift for friendship inspired a whole generation and the evidence of his legerdemain with pen and pencil will excite the wonder and admiration of generations to come. His sketches and drawings have been scattered through the pages of the architectural journals for the past fifty years. They are as individual and as personal as his signature or his voice.

His writings are rich in architectural and culinary lore and constitute a delightful record not only of his own personality, but of his time. Often he referred to the Latin poet Horace and the French gourmet Brillat-Savarin as his favorite authors. For to what purpose was man endowed with his five senses—of sight, touch, hearing, smell and taste—if not to use them for delight?

So to stand by while Rip prepared some delicate concoction of food or drink was like being present at a holy rite. And then to taste the delectable work of art resulting was to experience something akin to religious ecstasy. No gluttony was here involved but a respectful veneration of the ultimate possibilities of the hand, the eye, the nostril, and the palate. During the week some of us used to snatch quick lunches in Pie Alley or at Thompson's Spa on Washington Street (the waitresses were beautiful), but on Saturdays we always came together at Young's, or Ober's in Winter Place, where Rip presided over a leisurely and well ordered feast.

Throughout his long and happy life his interests and enthusiasms were shared by his wife, the former Miss Maud Alberta Mayall, and his son Hubert, now serving in the army air forces.

The last months of his life were devoted to the compilation of a history of the Boston Society of Architects among whose long line of distinguished presidents his name stands high. He served for three years as a member of The Board of Directors of The American Institute of Architects, and the dignity and prestige of his profession were matters of his deepest concern.

And now Hubert Ripley has gone. He laid down his pen and closed his eyes in quiet sleep on Tuesday, December the fifteenth. Perhaps these Horatian verses, quoted from one of the last letters he ever wrote—summing up, as they do, his aversion to cant and fol-de-rol—may serve as appropriate epitaph:

"This Persian Elegance, my lad, I hate;  
Bind leaves of linden, rather, for a crown,  
Nor search where blows the rosebush ultimate,  
Ere it bow down.

"The simple myrtle ever suits me best,  
Devoid of artifice, for you who wait  
And me who drink my wine and take my rest  
In simple state."