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# THE JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS

æsthetic beauty. At least I do not get it in the way that he does. My old fashioned philosophy does not permit me to acknowledge mere accident in beauty. That which evokes in me the emotional response and intellectual delight (which what I call "beautiful" always does) speaks to me in no uncertain terms of the designer. Beauty often attends unthought of and uninvited by the poor human instrument, but only, I believe, when the processes are natural, sane, logical, poetic. The problem for the architect is to think in harmony with what we call natural law. We are lost in a fog if we trust ourselves to any idea of finding beauty in mental processes that have somehow been cut adrift from the roots that go down deep in our common humanity.

The sensation of disturbance previously referred to is perhaps caused by the realization that we are not going to get very far in architecture or in anything else by bandying arguments. The novel "Maria Chapdelaine" gives one a wonderful mental atmosphere of beauty. It is very simple. Primitive nature, unsophisticated people, an episode of hope, disappointment, self sacrifice are its elements. And yet to have merely read it is a beautiful experience to be remembered always.

We find it hard to philosophize in times of stress. At the bed side where unseen forces are dealing with the life of one beloved, at the cradle where new born humanity in its most gracious and appealing form bids us weave a gauzy texture of dreams for the future, at the grave where our dearest one lies hidden, and grief, stark and desolating, has conquered us utterly: whenever the realities of life are borne in upon us so that we can but thrill or agonize, all criticism and word mongering seems worse than futile.

It is perhaps the severest indictment of Modern Art that we seem to have so much to say about it. But critics we have and may as well make the best of them. So let us give thanks when we find an honest and an unflattering one. Mr. Fry puts it mildly when he says "you will probably agree with me that all is not well with modern architecture." He names ten "heresies," as he calls them, in which he points out some architectural failures and inconsistencies. He is a heretic only to those who accept with smug self-satisfaction all things as they are. The Canadians in "Maria Chapdelaine" accept life as it is but not in self-satisfaction. Their point of view is humility, self-sacrifice and an abiding faith and love. Mr. Fry does not go far enough in some of his analyses but he goes farther than most critics of architecture who are concerned apparently only with appearances and the application of curiously superficial rules.

To those of us for whom Beauty was captured by Vignola with his calipers and measuring rod and stripped of all her mysterious provocation for all time Mr. Fry will seem very disrespectful. To those others of us, however, who still believe in Beauty as emotional, elusive and not to be realized through rules and formulæ, Mr. Fry will give the same enjoyment we feel when our children announce the discovery of some phenomenon which to us has lost all novelty and become an accepted fact. He has not told us anything that we did not

already know but he has phrased it all well in his own way and we are without stint in rejoicing that another kindred spirit has made his little profession of faith in the great scheme of Things as They Ought to Be.

WILLIAM L. STEELE.

## Obituary

### John Theodore Comes

Elected to the Institute in 1908  
Died at Pittsburgh, April 13, 1922

The death of John Theodore Comes leaves a void in the architectural life of Pittsburgh and of the nation that will take long to fill. His works, which are many, will not fail to remind his friends, co-workers, and associates of his energetic and tireless personality so long as they shall live.

He came to Pittsburgh about 26 years ago, at the age of 23, bringing with him an enthusiasm for his chosen profession that was to carry him far on the road to success. As a draftsman in St. Paul, Minnesota, he had early developed a facility at pen and ink drawing such as would have won recognition for him had he chosen to pursue this medium of expression. His talent, however, was early directed along the lines of ecclesiastical architecture and it is in this field that he became known from coast to coast.

To his ability and facility for expressing himself by his excellent drawings, he later added a remarkable gift for literary expression, both in writing and in lecture. In this way he gained for his advocacy of the good, the true, and the beautiful in his chosen branch of architecture a national audience that has been equalled by few other architects. Believing that men are influenced for good or evil by the nature of their surroundings, he applied all his energy and enthusiasm to the improvement of the character of architecture wherever he could make his influence felt. That he succeeded in large measure is attested by the many commissions that came to him from all parts of the country. His interest was not confined to architecture alone, but embraced the allied arts of painting, sculpture, metal working, stained glass and ceramics.

His burning faith and love for his Church was a religious instinct almost Mediæval in its ardor. It carried him steadily onward to better and greater achievements, and his tireless devotion will remain alive in all his buildings. At the time of his death his work of creating beautiful Church Architecture was growing faster than ever. Much had been accomplished but much more lay at his hand. "How inconsistent," he said, "to teach from the pulpit that the Church is the ground and pillar of truth, when perhaps the architectural pillar located back of the speaker, instead of being a pillar of honest masonry, is nothing but a sham of metal lath and plaster, painted to simulate marble, thereby violating the vital principle of truth in architecture."

Although the range of his work necessitated his frequent absence from home, he was ever ready to contribute his available time and efforts for the betterment

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

of art in the city of his adoption. He was the creator and chief organizer of the Pittsburgh Architectural Club,—an opportunity that he embraced almost as soon as he joined the architectural community of Pittsburgh. Often he has told us of the pride and satisfaction he felt that he was privileged to accomplish this work, and he ever took an active part in all the life of the community and gave unsparingly of his time and energy to help forward all public movements for the advancement and improvement of the city and its affairs. Often it was his call to lead and initiate. In the Architectural Club for many years he was its mainstay as well as its Father. In the Pittsburgh Chapter of the Institute he took leading parts in the upbuilding of organized professional effort to its present high standing. He was its Vice President at the time of his death. He was also a member of the Municipal Art Commission.

His was a very lovable character. He had many friends both in and out of the profession. Always earnest and serious in his affairs, he was at the same time ready for humor and the enjoyment of lighter things. But when he was stricken it seemed that nothing in his life was finer than the courage, simplicity, and faith with which he was filled. We shall never forget the last visit made with Henry Kroppf, after he had taken to his bed for the last time. No complaint passed his lips; no lack of interest in life was present; he knew he was doomed but dealt not with his fate. He accepted it, with almost no comment that he, at least, expressed. When we were ready to go he expressed a wish that we would hunt up a Bird House so that he might have it hung outside his window where he could see it from his bed. "Maybe a robin would come and nest in it," he said.

E. B. L. and C. T. I.

### George Spencer Morris

Elected to the Institute in 1910

Died in Philadelphia, April 12, 1922

George Spencer Morris received his early training in the office of Addison Hutton, Architect, Philadelphia, and after experience in several Architectural offices in Philadelphia, he entered professional practice with William S. Vaux in 1900.

This partnership existed for a number of years when it was dissolved and after a practice alone for three or four years, Mr. Morris formed a partnership with Richard Erskine, and under the name of Morris and Erskine, continued as the senior member of that firm until his death.

Mr. Morris had many interests outside the profession of Architecture. He was associated with the Academy of Natural Sciences, where he served as one of the Board of Curators, taking the greatest interest in the ornithological section. He had a large private collection of bird skins, which he had personally collected, not only locally but in Florida and the far west.

He had a local reputation as an artist and his work in lead pencil was of particular merit.

Mr. Morris was one of the earliest members of the T-Square Club of Philadelphia, and had been for many years an active member of the Philadelphia Sketch Club.

## Letters to the Editor

### Mumbo Jumbo (*Continued*)

It is indeed a strange circumstance that, on reading Mr. Magonigle's interesting transcription of certain Assyrian records, I should recognize, after all these years, the missing portion of a series of records which I unearthed during my first excursion in Assyria many years ago. I have always wondered about the missing text and its possible bearing upon the fragments I had so painfully deciphered. Now that it is before me, I am struck with the nice balance of the two records, how they supplement each other in thought, and make of the whole a complete parable of our profession. How trite but true it is to say that conditions have so little changed after all these years.

I am sure that Mr. Magonigle will be relieved to find that the continuation of his chronicle was not irrevocably lost, and I rejoice with him in our ability to present this complete record, at last, to those eager searchers after truth, with whom our profession is so notably filled in this day of grace.

The record, done into English as faithfully as I have been able, runs as follows, evidently picking up the narrative at the exact point where the previous record stopped.

WILLIAM STANLEY PARKER.

" . . . and the true God of our art sank back, heavy hearted, into his marvellous throne of Syrian cedar and ivory, wrought by the greatest artist of the day and already famed throughout Assyria and even among the Chaldeans. The embracing curve of its ample back and the echoing curves of its slender spreading legs lent a rhythmic charm to the throne of this true God of Art, high up on its alabaster-faced altar. Alas, what calamity was now to be witnessed! With a warning creak, quickly followed by an ominous crash, the throne gave way beneath the burden of its God and both were precipitated as one onto the heads of the silent throng standing spell bound around the altar.

"After the first awful moment of dismay and terror, the guards quickly cleared the populace from the temple. The minor Gods of Technique and Structural Security raised the True God of Art from his undignified position, prone amidst the debris of his throne. For a moment the spirit of the true artist flamed in his eye, but, God-like, he kept himself in hand and besought an explanation of the disaster. The God of Structural Security made a rapid survey of the fragments and quickly found the cause. The great artist, overzealous in his search for beauty of line and grace of proportion, had neglected the natural limitations of his medium. The cedar wood, familiar as roof beams, was little used in furniture and its nature was but poorly understood. The graceful curves and slender proportions left but little strength, the grain across the curve, already weak, was made still weaker by cutting for the inlays. So, ignorantly piling one weakness on another, did the artist work his own doom and the indignity of the True God he sought to serve.

"The True God listened and for a long time walked apart. His faith in the skill of his great artist was somewhat shaken. It had to be admitted that the graceful lines of his throne were no less graceful now that the remnants were temporarily reassembled, but as a throne it was of little use. Was it then so fine a work of art if it failed in serving its chief purpose? In failing to support its God, did it not also fail to support his plea for the preeminence of the artist? Was it possible that there was another God, more nearly equal to his own stature and dignity than he had supposed, who was challenging his right to preeminence, who was claiming with some show of justice the right to a throne beside his own?

"It were well to investigate. Every part of his temple and the adjoining palace had been constructed under the direction of the chief artists of the land. Were there hidden defects elsewhere in their work? Calling the God of Structural Security and the God of Technique, who somehow as they approached had acquired a certain dignity he