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Last Word on Architecture

By WAYNE ANDREWS

OUR ARCHITECTS may not have been able to satisfy every taste in the last few months, but there is no question that our architectural historians have been trying to please every type of reader, from the man who feels good all over after sampling someone else's moral indignation to the scholar who can't think of a better way to spend an evening than sitting down with the latest book by an authority in the field. Incidentally, the authorities may not even be historians in the academic sense of the word. One of the most delightful offerings is the work of a sculptor who has gone around the country photographing the decorative details of buildings most of us, more's the pity, have been too busy to examine.

If an award were granted for the most emphatic display of moral indignation, there is no doubt the winner would be Professor James Marston Fitch, author of *American Building: The Historical Forces That Shaped It* (second edition, revised and enlarged, Houghton Mifflin, \$12.50). His earnestness is evident on nearly every page, even in his random remarks on the origins of the Renaissance in England, where he gives us his opinion of the theology of the Middle Ages. "For the young bourgeoisie," he writes, "fighting free of the bemused paralysis and planless growth, the bottomless mysticism into which Europe had sunk, the Classic appeared as the ideal instrument for the reconstruction of man's consciousness."

When not telling Rome to mend its ways, Mr. Fitch is likely to be unveiling a new conspiracy of the Eastern money powers in the U.S. One of the exciting passages of *American Building* concerns Chicago at the time of the World's Fair of 1893. When local businessmen, the author informs us, "exchanged local partnerships for national trusts, they did more than acquire Wall Street's stocks and bonds, they also exchanged the last remnants of their provincial democracy for Wall Street's ideology." There are moments when Mr. Fitch sounds strangely like the valiant Kansas populist Mary Ellen Lease, who advised farmers to raise less corn and more hell, and actually published a book entitled *The Problem of Civilization Solved*.

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As you might imagine, Mr. Fitch takes a firm stand at all times against "the world of high fashion and great wealth," and any architect so unfortunate as to have designed buildings for the very rich is in for trouble. H. H. Richardson, whose greatest patrons were the wealthy Ames family of North Easton, Massachusetts, should by rights have been singled out for particular abuse, but the author solves this difficulty by insisting that Richardson's real home was Chicago and by forgetting that his great Chicago client Marshall Field was a boyhood friend of none other than J. P. Morgan.

The firm of McKim, Mead & White does not escape judgment so easily. Their shingle-style work, erected long before they were guilty of palaces, had, we are told, "little direct influence on the course of events." This is a curious statement. Later on we are informed that the shingle style "clearly became a factor" in Wright's Prairie Style houses.

The deep suspicion that Mr. Fitch harbors against eclectic architecture in all of its manifestations might have been excusable in 1927, when modern architecture looked like a lost cause; but it seems strangely old-fashioned in 1967, when many a modern architect has come to understand that Burnham and McKim had something to contribute in their later work. Reading Fitch, one would never guess that the protest a few years ago against the demolition of McKim's Pennsylvania Station was led by that arch-modernist Philip Johnson.

Since the author has little to offer by way of documentation, there is no way of knowing how he reached many of his startling conclusions. It would be fascinating, for example, to learn how he found out that Thomas Jefferson lost "his confidence, not in the Revolution but in the intellectuals" the moment Napoleon appeared on the scene. It would be equally interesting to discover why the Greek Revival is saluted on one page as "the idiom of the most progressive forces in American life" and denigrated on another, where we are warned that it was "adroitly used by Calhoun as a pedestal on which to display his monstrous 'democracy of tyrants' in the South."

It is rather a relief to turn from *American Building*, where every cliché that has accumulated in the history of modern architecture is defended with a vim and vigor that might have been spent

on a better cause, to Eric Arthur's *Toronto: No Mean City* (University of Toronto Press, \$15). Mr. Arthur, who is as calm and collected as Mr. Fitch is intemperate, gives us a charming, affectionate account of Toronto architecture down to the twentieth century. Even architectural buffs heading straight for Viljo Revell's brand-new city hall may want to pause a minute or two before the monuments of the nineteenth century revealed in this beautifully illustrated and exquisitely planned volume.

Anyone opening the late Carroll L. V. Meeks's *Italian Architecture 1750-1914* (Yale University Press, \$25) is bound to realize that he is in an even more rarified atmosphere. The truth is that he is in the presence of a scholar in search of something approaching complete objectivity. "To the American or British historian," Mr. Meeks tells us, "the architecture of their countries during the years 1750-1914 has become entangled with irrelevant factors, such as historic events or traditional derision, which make it difficult to judge the buildings as works of art. The greater the time interval, however, the greater objectivity is possible, and in the case of a country more remote from the historians' personal associations, such as Italy, English-speaking historians can aspire to a still greater degree of objectivity."

If Mr. Meeks were still with us he would be the first to deny that he had reached the goal of total objectivity, but there is no doubt that he has written what will be a classic text in a field too long neglected by scholars. For, Mr. Fitch to the contrary notwithstanding, we cannot begin to appreciate the evolution of modern architecture without paying the most loving attention to the romantic revivals from which it sprang. The various classic revivals which Mr. Meeks studies in detail make for a complicated story, but he succeeds nonetheless in discovering precedents for the International Style as well as antecedents for the symbolic forms of Eero Saarinen's colleges at Yale. Equally valuable is Mr. Meeks's summation of the Italian medievalists. He is not frightened by Gino Coppedè's Castello Mackenzie at Milan, which he hails as "incomparably picturesque . . . a minor Neuschwanstein." In later chapters he does his best to be fair to Sacconi's monument to Victor Emmanuel II in Rome, explores Mengoni's immortal Galleria in Milan, and tells us all we need to know of the Italian variety of Art Nouveau.

Mr. Meeks has done more than write an authoritative volume on pre-modern Italian architecture. He has also reminded us of how little we know about French and German architecture in this period, and it is to be hoped that the new generation of scholars will investi-



—From "Architects on Architecture."

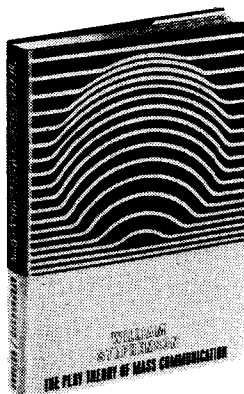
The Carlton Center, Johannesburg, South Africa, designed by Roy Allen.

gate these areas with something of his patience and industry. An even more obvious need, however, has been for a succinct summary of the Italian achievement in the Renaissance, for the old text of Anderson and Stratton, whatever its merits, is hopelessly out of date. Everyone will rejoice that this need has been met by Peter Murray, whose *Architecture of the Italian Renaissance*

(Schocken, paperback, \$2.95) is somewhat of a miracle, since it isn't every day that a genuine scholar takes the trouble to address the general public. Here is a book that may be read as a primer, and yet be thoroughly enjoyed by the experts.

"Renaissance architecture," Mr. Murray claims, "must be experienced as architecture, and it is only honest to say

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THE PLAY THEORY OF MASS COMMUNICATION

by William Stephenson

author of *The Study of Behavior*

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It presents a whole new theory of mass communication as essentially entertainment, fun and play; therefore, not informational, but attitudinal in essence. Mr. Stephenson puts forward a body of principles and procedures constituting a theory for the empirical study of the entertainment aspects of mass communication. The procedures derive from Q-methodology which is predicated largely on subjective rather than objective principles of measurement.

The varied applications of this theory extend to such diverse subjects as the Army — McCarthy hearings, the latest situation comedy, your favorite newspaper, the reduction of international tensions, and the concept of democracy. The great themes of war, peace, charismatic leadership, and national character can be intelligently explored and explained in terms of the theory of play. This is a major work — one that no reader who considers himself well-informed can afford to miss.

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that it is no easier (and no more difficult) to understand than a Bach figure." The Renaissance search for perfection of proportions is an intricate topic, but the author is neither confused nor confusing, whether discussing the treatises of Filarete and Serlio or the demands of Mannerism. What may be the most eloquent chapter of all deals with the Mannerism of Giulio Romano at the Palazzo del Te.

We shall never know enough about the Renaissance in Italy. Neither shall we ever be satisfied with our knowledge of the Middle Ages, and Whitney S. Stoddard's *Monastery and Cathedral in France* (Wesleyan University Press, \$22.50) is a commendable attempt to bring us up to date with the latest scholarship of the Anglo-Saxon world. Mr. Stoddard is most careful to acknowledge his debt to his peers and predecessors. This was kind of him, and it would be pleasant to add that he had come up with a number of insights all his own. This does not appear to be the case, and one can't help wishing that he had been able to communicate something of the original enthusiasm that must have sent him off on this quest long ago.

Mr. Stoddard's photographs, many of which he has taken himself, are as perfunctory as his prose, and not a few of his readers may want to consult the magnificently illustrated volumes on the French Middle Ages by Marcel Aubert and Simone Goubet, published in France by B. Arthaud. Although M. Arthaud may well be the supreme publisher of scenic and architectural photographs in the Western world—no shrewd traveler can afford to do without the dozens of volumes he has devoted to the French provinces—his firm has been neglected up to now in the United States, and it is a positive pleasure to congratulate A. S. Barnes for bringing out a translation of Friedrich Halves's *Cathedrals and Monasteries in Spain* (\$20), which M. Arthaud had the privilege of originating. Like Stoddard, Halves has taken many of his own pictures, but without forgetting that a good photograph must be a kind of poem in light. Even those who know their way around the Romanesque cloister of Santo Domingo de Silos blindfolded will be surprised by the views in this book, which includes practically everything from Santa Maria de Naranco down to the Escorial. As for the Escorial, Halves suggests that its creator, Philip II, could be accused of modesty. When the King visited the Carthusian charterhouse of Miraflores in the company of his architect Herrera, he is said to have remarked: "We did not achieve very much."

While we are on the subject of photographs, we might as well point out the curious innovation—or dereliction—

of the publishers of Norris Kelly Smith's *Frank Lloyd Wright: A Study in Architectural Content* (Prentice-Hall, paperback, \$2.45). There is not a single photographic credit to be found in this book—which may alarm the photographers responsible for the world-famous view of Falling Water on page 129. Probably it would be unfair to hold the author responsible for this oversight. Mr. Smith is a devoted admirer of Wright who has the great good sense to realize that his hero was not always perfect. "Although Wright professed concern for the character of each of his clients," he writes, "he did not feel obliged to give them what they wanted. All of his houses reflect the style and thought of their creator as clearly as do the portraits of Rembrandt." It is Mr. Smith's contention that Wright was bored by his success at the age of forty. "By 1909," we are told, "his work had not only become popular, it had begun to attract the approving attention of such pillars of respectable society as Henry Ford and Harold McCormick, whose patronage held out not the promise of success . . . but the threat of destruction. . . . How could he compare himself with Thoreau and



Whitman while putting his art in the service of such multimillionaires?" Mr. Smith must be given his due for taking a new look at the old master. He sees him as hostile to the end to much that passes for civilization in the modern world, and makes much of the fact that the Johnson Wax Building was shown on TV "in the guise of a monastic church."

Although Wright died as recently as 1959, it is possible to survey his overwhelming achievement with a certain perspective. This is an advantage denied to John Jacobus, author of *Twentieth-Century Architecture: The Middle Years 1940-1965* (Praeger, \$18.50), and to Paul Heyer, author of *Architects on Architecture: New Directions in America* (Walker, \$17.50). Here are two writers who must make guesses on the basis of evidence that will be sifted and weighed only after most of us have vanished from the earth. But there is no reason to look askance at either Jacobus or Heyer for having attempted the impossible: the impossible should be always welcomed.

Mr. Heyer, who reached his conclusions after interviewing forty-odd architects across the land, has come up with a book that has all the perverse charm of a class album. If you find (and who doesn't?) a genuine enjoy-

ment in someone else's indiscreet remarks, you will find plenty to amuse you here, beginning with Minoru Yamasaki's strange confession that his new World Trade Center "should become a living representation of man's belief in humanity." But you will also find a good many challenging statements by Paolo Soleri, who hasn't begun to receive the publicity he may deserve; and you won't be surprised to discover that Philip Johnson, as usual, makes more sense than anyone else. "Structural honesty," reports the co-designer of the Seagram Building, "seems to be one of the bugaboos that we should free ourselves from very quickly There is only one absolute today, and that is change."

"The heroic epoch of discovery was over," declares Mr. Jacobus on the very first page of his book. What he is chronicling, after all, is the dissolution of the International Style. "Contemporary architects are increasingly aware of their immediate heritage and, unlike their predecessors, they are becoming reconciled to many facets of historical tradition that were anathema only yesterday." His hero, and not many will quarrel with him on this point, appears to be Le Corbusier, who "seemed in his final works to be invariably on the threshold of some new discovery. No other architect created so much anticipation, even surprise among his admirers." Mr. Jacobus may be too critical now and then of Eero Saarinen, but is obliged to admit that "in the process of evolving from a Miesian to a Corbusian position" he "did more than reflect the changing tastes and passions of his time: he truly found himself as an architect and as a designer." Not surprisingly, Mr. Jacobus is disappointed in Walter Gropius. "Of the major architectural figures of the twentieth century, only Gropius has somehow failed to develop a consequential and individual late style. Instead he has drifted into a vernacular modern style of distinction but not of historical significance."

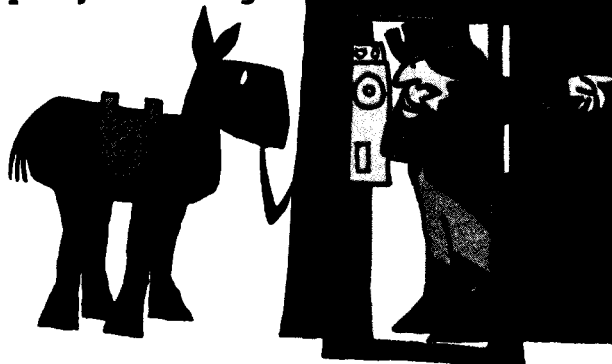
Mr. Jacobus's book is an arresting example of how much the mind of man can comprehend of what is built in our own times. But the mind of man, as sculptor Ben Karp, author of *Wood Motifs in American Domestic Architecture* (Barnes, \$12.50), might argue can comprehend only so much. Mr. Karp in his astonishing photographs appeals to our eyes. Scouting the countryside from his own New Paltz, New York, to Manchester, New Hampshire, and beyond, he has forced us to recognize beauty where we might never have guessed such promise. His message seems to be that we should look before we think. Which is exactly where we should begin.

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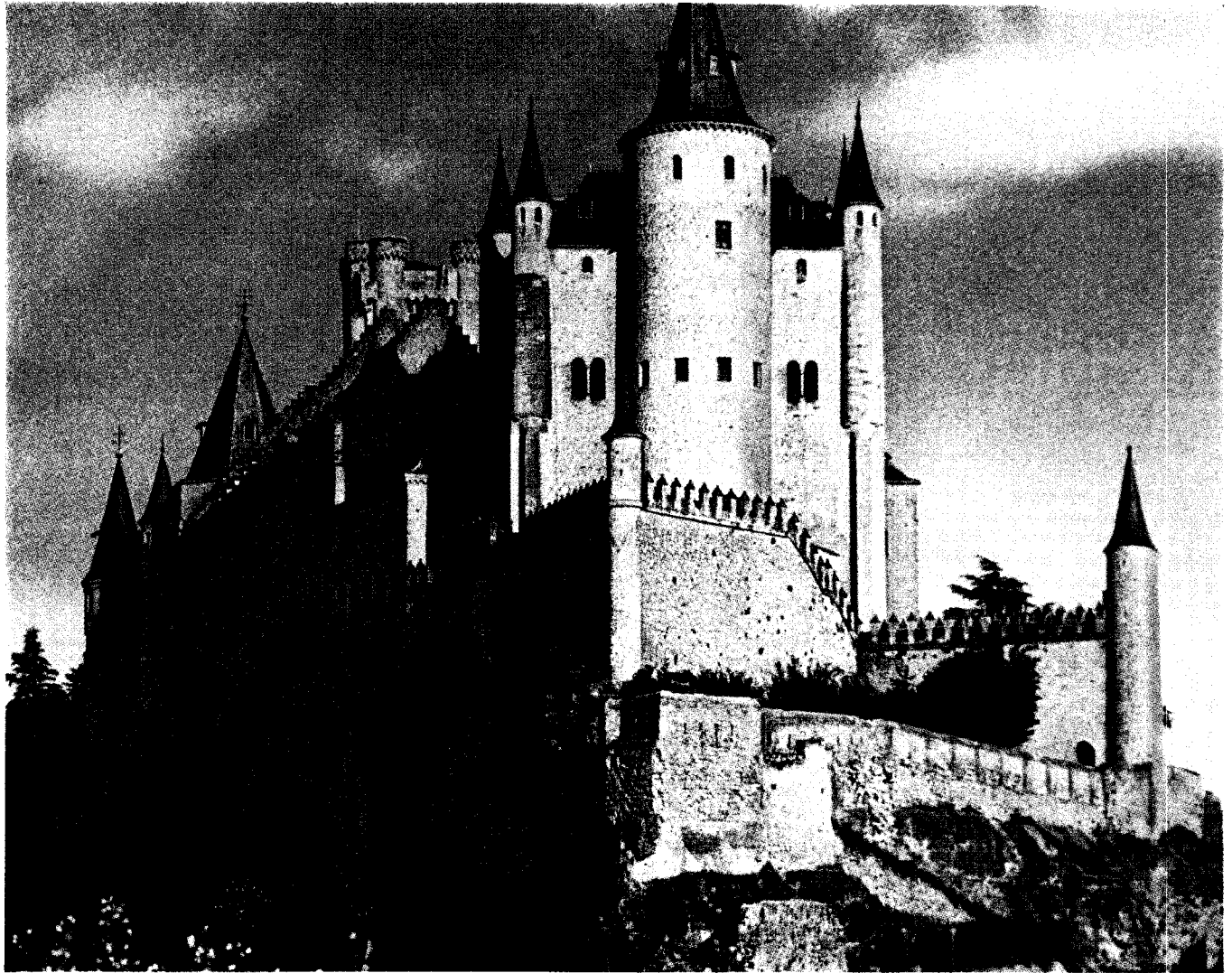


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IN THE WRITER'S PLACE

A Special Section

LANDSCAPES that put a throb in the voice of Fitzpatrick, old ruins that beguile historians, bygone battlefields that stir the imagination of old soldiers, culinary exercises that stir the buds of those weaned on cafeteria cuisine, shops brimful of exotic goods that tantalize the bargain bush-beaters—all these can cause a severe outbreak of wanderlust, especially in the spring. To these attractions, says Anthony Netboy in the article which begins overleaf, one must add the writer. Not a live writer, mark you—for whom, as Mr. Netboy explains, few will cross the street for a look. But let the writer pass from the earth and his haunts, his homes, his hangouts suddenly become enshrined. Their very presence in some foreign quarter is enough to inspire literary pilgrimages.

There is, as well, the identification of writers with places about which they wrote, and these places, too, have become celebrated. In and around the 65 pages that follow, a number of writing people (perhaps some day to be enshrined themselves) have written of the famed *littérateurs* and the mark they left on many lands which they loved, in which they lived, or both. Mr. Netboy, who has written on the phenomenon of the writer in his new posture—as a tourist attraction—is a professor in Oregon and lectures on travel. Mary Hemingway, with great style, re-