

THE

214

# PRINCETON MAGAZINE.

EDITED BY

WILLIAM C. ALEXANDER.

---

VOL. I.

---

PRINTED BY JOHN T. ROBINSON.

1850.

THE  
PRINCETON MAGAZINE.

---

PEDAGOGICS.

No. II.

The second circumstance that strikes us as a characteristic of too many recent theories, is an apparent misconception of what education is. There are some, very many, who appear to think that they have gained a great advantage, when they have excluded from their course of elementary instruction whatever does not bear directly upon some form of active business. The cant phrase with theorists of this class is "practical utility." We need scarcely say, that the expression, thus applied, is grossly perverted, or at least unfairly limited. Until it can be proved, that a foundation must consist of the same materials and be constructed in the same way as the superstructure, we shall maintain that this confounding of professional with preparatory studies has as little pretensions to practical utility as it has to philosophical exactness and consistency. Such as have had it in their power to compare this mushroom vegetation with that sure, though tedious growth, which has a sound root to depend upon, need not be told where lies the difference.

Of this mistake the practical result is rather felt than seen. It is felt by the community, when it finds men pressing into

well known and experienced members, and debates are conducted very much by the same persons. How much nobler is our theory and practice of parliamentary eloquence. Our idea is not that of a meeting for business, but of a college declamation, in which the speeches are made for their own sake, and each competitor may take his time, whether he has any thing to say or not. In carrying out this grand idea, we are beaten only by the French, who not only have a theatrical hall for the exhibition, but a stage or tribune, where the orator displays himself precisely as at school and college. This is the only foreign innovation which deserves to be introduced at Washington, and I rejoice to see that it has been proposed. As to that other proposition of removing the desks and narrowing the area, it is a movement backwards towards the antiquated barbarism of the mother country; and would no doubt be followed by a fatal change from long to short and from fine to plain in our congressional eloquence, if not from a noble prodigality to vulgar cheapness in our legislation.

SMITH.

South Smithville, Dec. 20, 1850.

---

## ROADSIDE ARCHITECTURE.

In modern landscape gardening, we have a beautiful instance of the application which may be made of taste, in its true principles, to a branch of domestic decoration; thus producing a new art. How much Americans owe in this respect to the labours of Mr. Downing, it is unnecessary here to commemorate; the influence of his patriotic instructions is visible in the pleasure grounds of innumerable estates.

The same principles have been applied with much elegance to the construction of country-houses and cottages, by this diligent and tasteful writer, who deserves the thanks of

the whole community. It is upon a particular branch of the latter subject, that I would now offer a few observations.

In travelling, there are no objects which we regard with greater interest than the rural dwellings, which from time to time break upon our view. In no objects of the artificial sort do we discern a more striking diversity. Once in a while, the eye is saluted by a cottage or a farm-house which satisfies and delights ; it is neat, harmonious, and picturesque. We forget the accidents of age, colour and material, in the adjustment of the parts, and the ratio of the lines, the grace of the outline, and the felicitous accompaniment of shade, garden, bank, meadow, grove and background. Unfortunately these gems are few and far between. On our high roads, the sad reverse meets us in a succession of houses which exemplify every variety of ignorance and perverse fancy. This is not to be marvelled at, when we consider that in the majority of instances, no reference has been had to any principle, but that of supposed economy. The architecture is purely accidental. Yet these objects stand for generations ; eyesores amounting to thousands, and deforming the face of nature in every part of the country. One bad pattern is followed by multitudes. In certain districts, false taste becomes prevalent and characteristic, and we have horrors on horrors, where all might have been grace and beauty. A man determines to rear a dwelling house, and gathers his materials. If he does not copy his neighbour's structure, he consults with no one but the country mason and carpenter. The result is some tall, spindling, clap-board affair, in which doors, windows, chimneys and sheds, are thrown together in defiance of every rule of symmetry and order. I have often wondered that the same man whose eye is offended by the slightest deviation from normal outline in the points of a horse, should be blinder than a beetle in regard to a mansion which stands him in some thousands of dollars. It is not simple irregularity that is now complained of, for the houses here censured are some-

times bounded by a few naked lines. A multitude of parts, even without similarity of figure, is compatible with much beauty of architecture, as we know from the castellated structures of the middle ages, and the complex forms of many English cottages. There are however laws to be observed, in such accumulation of parts, which may reduce the otherwise straggling piles to unity; and it is the neglect of these, and the abuse of all plan and idea, which cause the stupid and offensive masses that disfigure the land.

If I were called on to name the most fruitful source of those evils, I should point out a single false maxim, namely, that *there is economy in ugliness*. Ignorance supposes that beauty is necessarily expensive. This is clearly erroneous. If grace of building were the result of costly material it might be so. It is however not cost, but knowledge, which is lacking. Materials of enormous price may be put together hideously; while, on the other hand, the most frugal outlay may be so governed and husbanded by good taste, as to produce consummate beauty. It might even be shown, that in many instances, economy and symmetry go together, and that some of the most beautiful edifices are at the same time the cheapest. That which strikes the beholder in a country house, especially in the passing, roadside view, which we are now taking, is not the stone and timber, whether costly or not, but the plan, the proportions, and the general contour. In these the gracefulness of the building resides. These attract and gratify us, at the most distant view. These depend on that original draught of plan and elevation, without which no structure can be more than an accident; and though there may be lucky throws in other hazards, no man ever stumbled on a good architectural plan by chance.

The remedy for this evil would obviously be the diffusion of sound principles in the community. Next to this, is the education of operative builders, in some general knowledge of tasteful architecture. Besides which may be mentioned the happy examples of even a few well-conceived houses, in

every part of the land. Because a dwelling is in the country, because it is a small and low-priced, should be no apology for its being deformed. In the view I am now taking of the subject, these erections concern not merely the occupant but the country. To a certain extent they are public property. They are daily and hourly in the public eye, to give pleasure or disgust. The man who puts up a tasteful house is a public benefactor. The gratification of his own eye is the least part of the good effect. Thousands receive instruction and delight, who never cross that threshold. By the natural process of imitation, the attempt is made by others to follow in the same track; and thus certain neighbourhoods, especially in New England, have a style of rural building which is quite their own. Hence the very first thing a farmer should do before erecting his house, is to call in the aid of an accomplished master of architecture. It will cost him a few dollars forsooth; but these will be well bestowed; while in some cases, the lessons which he thus receives will really tend to lessen his bills, by suggesting economical improvements.

The tendency all over our country is to run up houses on scanty areas; to add undue height, for the given base; to leave the apertures to chance, and thus mar the whole countenance of the structure; to secure the worst possible angle of roof; to make the brick chimneys gaunt and naked; and to curtail the eaves, which beyond most parts give expression to the whole work. Some of the newest houses along our roads are the meanest. I could pick out many an old stone edifice, made by the first settlers, which would far sooner attract the notice of a painter or an architect. One unsightly building is enough to spoil a whole landscape. One pleasing cottage repays the traveller for miles of weariness. But the painful truth is, that these objects, numerous and increasing as they are, and unchangeable as they remain, are for the most part reared without the remotest

reference to any principle of beauty. Nothing can be hoped until those who build shall consent to take a little counsel.

As every man thinks himself able to mend a fire, so every man thinks he can plan a house. As few have the latter to do oftener than once in a lifetime, it is something like choosing a wife: mistakes can seldom be rectified. Let the mortifying truth be told: of those who are competent to draft a graceful or even a neat dwelling, the proportion is about one in ten thousand. Without resort to the calculus of probabilities, we may easily conceive what the architecture of the country is like to be, if stubborn proprietors persist in being their own planners. He that doctors himself, has a fool for his patient; and he that draws his own will, has it broken over his coffin: yet men will persevere in outraging the public taste, by assuming to be their own architects. There are but two ways for a wise man; one is to master the principles of the art for himself, the other is to consult those who are already masters.

In regard to a matter in which we are all so much interested, and in which the credit of the country is so much involved, I have often queried with myself, whether some joint action might not be taken by the friends of homestead decoration. On these subjects I speak with diffidence. Our agricultural and horticultural societies have done incalculable good, by holding out prizes, for the best ox, the best apples, and the best machines. Might not these societies, or perhaps a separate one formed for the purpose, offer prizes for the best farm-house; for the best cottage; for the best labourer's dwelling? Might not greater facilities be afforded, for imbuing our young builders with just principles of taste in architecture; by schools, models and lectures, at central points? This would be striking very near the root of the evil; for a state of the arts is conceivable in which a builder would refuse to execute a preposterous plan, for any money.

C. Q.