BOOK REVIEWS


“If they honor me for the pigmy things I have already done, what will they say when they see Pittsburgh [Courthouse] finished.” Thus Richardson assessed the building he considered his masterpiece. But he died April 27, 1886, aged forty-eight, two years before the Courthouse and Jail were finished. Of the relatively few buildings designed during his short life, Mrs. Van Rensselaer writes that these buildings represented the “full expression of his mature power in his favorite medium.” These buildings were recently marked in September of this year with bronze plaques by the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation. The ceremonies appropriately were conducted by James Van Trump who has written the scholarly introduction to this new edition. Mr. Van Trump's many literary pieces celebrating the Victorian and related styles form an invaluable record for posterity.

Charles Francis Adams, Jr., said, “He [Richardson] was large in everything — large in conception, large in soul, large in body.” A designer of genius, wholly free of affectation, his story is told in simple distinguished style by Mrs. Van Rensselaer. Though she knew Richardson personally, her critical analysis of his architecture is objective and sound, as is her fascinating account of his life and personality. The book should appeal to the lay reader as much as to the student of architecture.

I have known this book for many years as an inheritance in the library of my father, Edward Stotz. A Pittsburgh architect, he began practice the year the book was published, 1888. As with other architects of his time, he fell under the spell of Richardson's bold approach to architecture which so tellingly combined strength with delicacy. In the massive arched entrance of the Fifth Avenue High School, which he designed in 1895, the influence of Richardson is obvious.

The designs of architects are now rarely concerned with architecture based upon traditional form except in the restoration of early buildings. Indeed the history of architecture is given scant attention in the schools today. To account for the use of Romanesque architecture of such utilitarian and secular character as a courthouse may only
be understood when we consider the times in which its designer lived. Richardson was born and spent his boyhood in New Orleans. He went to study in l'Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, a student then of means and earnest purpose. The Civil War totally cut off his funds. He spent years of privation, supporting himself by working in architectural offices in Paris while endeavoring to complete his education. The Romanesque style, examples of which he saw about him, he found beautiful and stimulating. His circumscribed early days, even in France, permitted little or no travel, but he had one grand tour in 1882. His keenest delight, as they remain today for the sensitive architect, were the inexpressibly beautiful sculptures and forms of southern French Romanesque architecture, notably St. Trophine and St. Gilles in Arles. During a brief sojourn in Spain he was struck by the great arches of Avila and other towns, some with eight- to ten-foot voussoirs, or arch stones. This was later to bear fruit in the monumental granite walls of the Jail and in the details of the magnificent, soaring tower of the Courthouse. The lions which guard the Grant Street entrance are among the most distinguished architectural sculptures of modern times. The Courthouse was among the last of the tall wall-bearing buildings. The introduction of steel spelled the end of the deep masonry recesses of door and window — the day of the massive Romanesque buildings was soon to pass.

It is regrettable that one of the most impressive interiors in Pittsburgh, or for that matter anywhere in this country, is seen only by a few and not very discriminating members of our society — the prisoners in the Jail. This reviewer once made a study of this building for possible eventual use as a Museum of Science and Industry and for the first time saw with amazement the interior of this remarkable building. With but the removal of the cell blocks, one might think himself in the nave of a twelfth century church.

There are drawings and photos of many other buildings, chiefly in the New England area. Probably the best known and most respected work of Richardson's is Trinity Church in Boston. Here the style is altogether appropriate and handled with masterly skill. Another Romanesque structure, the Capitol at Albany, though not so fortunate a subject for this style is a most impressive building. Richardson applied his skills alike to railroad stations, residences, stores and college buildings. Many of these commissions were gained through competitions which were then a fairly common method of selecting an architect. For example, Richardson in 1884 won the competition for the
Pittsburgh Courthouse for which a budget of $2,243,024 had been set aside.

Richardson was a giant among the eclectic architects. He was followed by masters in other styles, such as McKim and White, Goodhue and Cram, and Charles Klauder, all eclectic in taste. These men had so well assimilated the forms and vocabulary of earlier styles, that they left on their designs the stamp of their individual genius. This was not copybook work but design of masterly kind. Indeed the design of their buildings is often as recognizable as the architect's signatures. In thinking of Richardson, one is reminded of the epitaph of the distinguished English architect, Van Brugh: "Lie heavy on him earth, he laid many a heavy load on thee."

Pittsburgh

Charles M. Stotz


This book is bound to raise questions about whether the men of a hundred years ago can be judged fairly by the standards of today. Those criteria themselves are not yet definitely established. Certainly, they are not accepted universally.

For example, Andrew Carnegie is cited in these pages pre-eminently as "an entrepreneur." But that word is not accepted everywhere or by everybody to mean what Prof. Hacker considers it to signify. The French original form of the term is translated as "manager" or "undertaker." In colloquial usage it symbolizes gambler. The persons to whom it is applied may be venturers or hazarders. Shakespeare, in *The Merchant of Venice*, says appropriately: "Men that hazard all do it in hope of fair advantages." But the Bard well understood the risks of life and death involved. A reader of Dr. Hacker's appraisal of Carnegie, of course, will desire an accurate definition of his activities.

If "entrepreneur" means, in the dictum of the *Merriam-Webster Third New International Dictionary* (1963), "organizer of an economic venture, especially one who organizes, owns, manages, and assumes the risks of a business," it does not describe Carnegie fully or completely as Dr. Hacker sees him. Even if "one that organizes, pro-