WHAT I THINK OF MODERN ARCHITECTURE

BY SIR EDWIN LUTYENS.

IT is both exhilarating and somewhat alarming to watch the work that is being produced by the younger men of to-day—youthful glamour striving after something fresh, something better. New materials, new needs and strange sources of ideas have come into being since men of my age began, in our turn, to try to produce fresher and better things. Forty years ago steel construction for buildings was in its infancy. Reinforced concrete was untried. Motor cars, aeroplanes and most of the mechanical contrivances that play so large a part in life to-day were unheard of. It is inevitable, and right, that these things should influence architecture, the machines no less than the materials. But for my part I regret the passing, be it temporary or permanent, of humanism and the personal note; the eclipse by impersonal machines of bricklayer, mason and joiner as the makers of buildings. If you eliminate the personal touch from architecture, you lose a considerable part of its pertinence. Traditional ways of handling material—tiles, bricks, timber and stone—are the basis of style in architecture, besides one of its chief joys. The modern impersonal architecture of so-called functionalism does not seem to me to be replacing the inherited lore of centuries with anything of comparable excellence or to show as yet a genuine sense of style—a style rooted in feeling for the right use of materials. One cannot make friends, through it, with the men who built it. It is all "factory and crane." I can see no wit or humour in the "features," while the architectural relations seem to me haphazard as often as not.

WATER WORKS, FELTHAM.

The best of the old work was composed, the designer never losing control of his orchestra of materials or forgetting the needs they had to meet. The design had a trajectory of scale and idea like that of a rocket, continuous from bang to burst. Modern buildings do not seem to have a feeling of growth. The forms and the details meet as strangers. Their phrasing consists of little more than an initial and a mark of new and complete interrogation.

My generation is—perhaps I ought to say was—a humanist generation. We believed that the measure of man's architecture was man, and that the rhythm of a building should correspond to the rhythms familiar in human life. All architecture must have rhythms, that affect the eye as music does the ear, producing vibrations in the brain. The rhythms of modern architecture rarely produce what I should call a happy or genial vibration in the brain of the spectator. It is either a wearisome staccato like the noise of an hydraulic drill or, to my mind, a confused medley like the tuning of a brass band. Instead of making a statement gracefully, and perhaps with distinction and humour—which is what I require of a building as of an individual—many modern buildings, to me, are just shouting very loud and quite unintelligibly. I catch a phrase here and there, recognise now and then a scrap of English or Italian maybe, but there seems to me no grammar and little sincere effort at style. There is vitality—heaps of it, but crude. Perhaps the human rhythm which modern architecture expresses, along with the rhythm of electric drills and combustion engines, is the rhythm of a football crowd

OLYMPIA.

BECHSTEIN HALL.

YARDLEY'S, BOND STREET.

or of "the proletariat" in the mass. Crowd psychology in place of the conversation of a civilised man.

There is a passage in a book by my friend Professor Richardson that expresses, better than I can put it, the superiority of humanism to this architecture of indigestible elements:

> There is just as much vitality in the classic tradition as there ever was, and as much scope for the play of imagination without transgressing the proprieties. When architects approach design with the same sense of style and the same zest as their predecessors of the 17th, 18th, and even early 19th centuries, we see that there is no end to the variety and interest inherent in the humanist tradition. It supplies a language—a rich and beautiful language, with a plentiful variety of forms and precedents and allusions.

The classic tradition sets a standard. There are innumerable things that an educated humanist "does not do," just as there are things that a writer tries not to commit: platitudes, jingles, slipshod construction, journalese. It would be very easy to write if one invented one's own language. That is what I feel about the average modern building. It has been easy to design because there is, as yet, no grammar. The modern solutions are not proved. In the absence of a new standard

THE VICTORIA CINEMA.

of criticism one must judge modern architecture by the same standards as one judges the traditional. For we cannot get rid of the body of the tradition, murder it how we may. It is always with us.

By tradition I do not mean the unthinking repetition of antique forms—the hanging of Roman togas on Victorian towel-horses. Tradition to me consists in our inherited sense of structural fitness, the evolution of rhythmic form by a synthesis of needs and materials, the avoidance of arbitrary faults by the exercise of common sense coupled with sensibility. Many modern buildings, by straining, at all costs, not to be academic, ignore structural fitness as arbitrarily as the most academic of designs have done in the past. The most unhappy productions of all are to be found where an architect has tried to combine traditionalism and modernism. Then architecture becomes merely scenery without the consistency of either.

The most emphatically modern building in London is, I suppose, the addition to Olympia. It is a very impressive example of the architecture of concrete, with its angle windows, unobjectionable in a concrete building, and the tremendous lintel spans that concrete enables to be used. It is cased in reconstructed stone. Here, it may be said, a new style has successfully been shaped out of a new material.

But, as a matter of fact, the building is not built of concrete at all, but of brick and steel girders, cleverly used to suggest concrete construction. The angle windows are not windows. The vertical angle girder can be seen blocking them. In fact, impressive as the style of the work is, it is as insincere as a building like Selfridge's, where a steel skeleton is faced with columns, and, in my opinion, has no more meaning. It is not a daring

experiment with a new material, and has most of the faults of unrelieved academic architecture in which non-structural features are made to look structural, while the real work is done by unseen and unexpressed girders. And the design has fallen into the error which the most academic architect would make, of seeking symmetry where it does not exist—for example, by repeating the angle *motif* towards, but not quite at, the other end of the façade. The result is unfortunate, producing an unpleasant dovetailing of planes that has no meaning. The Modern Style should be able to get round mere symmetry.

Another apparently very logical building is the Metropolitan Water Board's new pumping house. It has the music of a Greek temple, which is why it pleases, but the voids and solids are reversed. And when we come to look at it, *is* it so logical? The tall narrow windows, ostensibly to light a high hall, are subdivided. Classic architecture did at least allow for floors. The low wings join on to the high centre block as two tramcars join when they collide. They just run into it without any expressed relationship. Near the bottom of the bastion in front is a grating. A tiny feature, but it sums up the thoughtlessness of the design as a whole, for no attempt has been made to fit it in with the imitation channelled masonry. If it really was masonry, the triangle beneath the grating would fall off before long. This kind of design is too easy, too illogical, to stand looking into.

Yardley's in Bond Street is faced with marble and looks very efficient. But, to my eye, it is full of tiresome slips. The main feature is two projecting ranges of steel-framed casements. But the extent of their projection has no relation to anything. A projecting window to be satisfactory should project the width of one or more of its own lights. It then has cohesion with something. Another instance of thoughtlessness is the top swung casements which reflect the sky. Any element in a design so placed that it reflects the sky inadvertently is bad in architecture, for it disturbs unnecessarily. Modern buildings are always doing this and disturbing the landscape, whether it be one of town or country. The Bechstein Hall seems to me quite meaningless. The ornament has no apparent structural significance and suggests to me only that Mr. Bechstein is fond of asparagus.

The New Victoria Cinema is a courageous and arresting experiment in theatre design. I believe it is a young architect's first commission, and I hope my few silly questions will not hurt his feelings. But I should like to ask (as the uninitiated are justified in asking when looking at any building) how it stands up? How are those transversal slices of stone carried? The idea of emphasising the horizontal lines is good, but it might have been better and more sympathetically worked out—as, for instance, where the sandwich is rolled into a cigarette beyond the central feature and looks just like a large collar and sleeve drain pipe. And why the battlements? Over the entrances is an imitation of traditional masonry in concrete. Why be traditional when you can be modern? Why run three horizontal joints through over the door when one was needed, and imitate *bad* masonry?—for the lintels have no apparent abutment on the imposts.

It is this kind of haphazardness, lack of grammar, inconsequence, that I find disturbing in much modern architecture. These adventurous young men thrill me tremendously and all my sympathies are with them. But good architecture needs more than bright ideas, and by my traditional standards most modern buildings seem to me to lack style and cohesion, besides being unfriendly and crude.

WIMBLEDON ONCE MORE

WIMBLEDON celebrated its official jubilee five years ago, but, since its half century of life included the War interregnum, only fifty championship meetings have actually come and gone. Compared with the Derby or with the Boat Race, it is scarcely old enough to have ghosts or legends. There are many men living who saw Spencer W. Gore, the first champion, in action on a converted croquet lawn, and even William Renshaw, father of the overhead service and smash, if he had been alive to-day, would only have been a few years older than the present All-England veteran champion. Indeed, the fact that Wimbledon, like lawn tennis itself, is but relatively youthful does but help to strengthen its position and popularity. We live in days of melting frontiers, democratic ambition and an international competition which finds an eager expression in games. What more natural that a pastime with a common code of rules, easy to play and easy to watch, allowing both sexes to shine together, and promoting social union, should engage the sympathy and develop the energies of the world's youth?

Times and tendencies have favoured Wimbledon. It has prospered in spite of the fact that no English champion on the male side has been crowned for over twenty years—surely a tribute to the catholicity of a game which England invented and exported. Patriotism is not the keynote of the crowd's salute; those whom the gallery favour in this game of all countries need not necessarily have nations to their names. Where personality has such a wide field for expression, where individuality can command so much attention, where the stage is so close to the pit, nativity is obscured as naturally as it is at the theatre. Alien origin may, indeed, be an added attraction; for just as we cross the waters to be stimulated or amused by new cities and new peoples, so we may spend a sunny afternoon at Wimbledon to be diverted and refreshed by players who bring bits of these oversea lands to our metropolis. Wimbledon would not be Wimbledon if all the great players were home-grown. The centre court would lose its lure if the public were denied a diversity of race and style. We may admit this distinctive attribute of Wimbledon and yet desire that our own people should win again. Championships are not only within the reach of a refined few; they only come to men (and women) of sturdy character and proved physique. They are the heritage of high endeavour. A champion's prestige is his country's as well as his own. He must necessarily, by his own success, stimulate the ardour and feed the ambition of his immediate circle. Boys look to their own preceptors for inspiration, and boys are keeping term during Wimbledon; they rarely see the champions of other lands in action. For an Englishman to win the title would be good for England at home and England abroad—for democracies are inclined to appraise a nation by its athletic prowess.

Is victory possible? The contingencies are many. The winner of the men's singles has to survive seven rounds, and every round may challenge his physical and moral fibre. Tilden was versatile enough in his relatively old age—he was thirty-seven last July—to employ strokes which taxed his mobility least—a withering service that could be delivered from an anchored base, a defensive slice, a really fast drive only when the opening had been prepared. But Tilden was a law unto himself. Inspect his shoulders in a photographic group. They are protrudingly square; in them resides phenomenal strength. Tilden can endure where nearly all his rivals may wilt. I have seen him play fourteen consecutive sets in the moist Long Island heat and serve as militantly in the last set as in the first. It is this service power of the Americans which scores at Wimbledon, and Frank X. Shields, who is making his début on our courts this year, can serve as fast, if not as steadily, as Tilden. British players have been handicapped by the lack of practice against the frontal attack. When they meet it in a critical championship match they have been inclined to bend before the storm. Yet the technique of Austin and Perry is superior to that of most of the invaders. Neither is penalised under pressure by a

F. J. PERRY, WHO HAS PLAYED SO WELL IN THE DAVIS CUP.