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BOOKS

Colonial Foundations

THE EARLY AUSTRALIAN ARCHITECTS AND THEIR WORK, by Morton Herman; Angus and Robertson, Australian price £4.4/-.

(Reviewed by C.M.M.)

THE essence of building is the provision of shelter from whatever materials are available. When such materials are composed in a form which offers some aesthetic or intellectual satisfaction, the product is architecture. To trace the development from mere building to architecture in Australia has been the object of this book. The author, himself a practising architect, set about collecting evidence of the country's architectural development from the time Arthur Phillip landed the first convicts in Botany Bay.

Since the story of architecture is the story of the human endeavours of the people who produce it, the progression of failures, disappointments, and the ultimate successes is there to be read in timber, brick and stone. The author's interpretation of these evidences is sympathetic, graphic and realistic.

The reluctant founders of the new colony were ill equipped for the job they had to do. Tools were few, skill limited, and the building materials of the new world unknown in their behaviour. Building practices well tried and established in the old country were applied and many found to fail. The unaccustomed dry spells, the rains which to the new arrivals seemed torrential, and the violent winds of "the bry" all took their toll. The new climate could not be tamed, so new methods of building had to be found.

For some years the colonists lived in a variety of improvised shelters, while Governor Phillip sent endless requests home for tools and implements. Slowly, as the tools were finally provided, and a few skilled tradesmen arrived, Australia's architectural history began.

Of those who practised architecture in the early days of the colony much of human interest is to be found. Remembering that architecture throughout the world at the time was at a generally low ebb, and eclecticism was the rule rather than the exception, it is surprising that even a few men with ability to design ever reached Australia. Those who did were not masters. As the author points out, much of the early work was

indifferent, some of it bad, but all of it contained historical interest. The buildings to which most attention is paid are those which gained their appeal from being unpretentious, of inherently good proportions and which expressed the natural materials of which they were built—those buildings which fulfilled a definite need in the formation of the young society.

The illustrations to the text, black and white and water-colour, are executed in a masterly hand. They are not prepared for pure artistic value but are the work of a craftsman compiling a factual, historical record. They gain their objective.

The "mutilation" (the word is the author's) of buildings of historical value is deplored. Reverence of beauty is not often found where necessity rules, but it is also necessary that records of past works should be collected before it is too late. In New Zealand, examples of our short architectural heritage are fast disappearing. Many of our notable old timber structures have already been demolished without adequate record. This must be a source of regret in the future.

A companion volume tracing Australian work from the early colonial period to the present day is to follow.

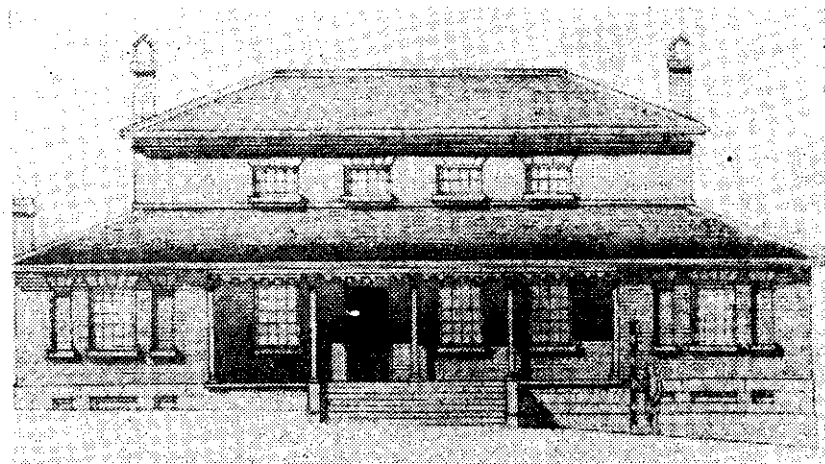
HIMALAYAN REVIEW

THE MOUNTAIN WORLD, 1954, edited by Marcel Kurz; George Allen and Unwin, English price 25/-.

PRINTED in Switzerland, and with editions published in America, France, Switzerland, Germany and Italy, this book can claim to be the most international of its kind. The success of the 1953 volume prompted the Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research to concentrate on the Himalayas for their next issue. The result is a list of subjects and writers that for interest and brilliance may never again be equalled in mountaineering literature.

Mount Everest is covered by the Swiss, Gabriel Chevalley and Raymond Lambert, followed by Sir John Hunt and Wilfrid Noyce. The version by Noyce is clear and simple. The American attempt on K2 by Charles S. Houston is magnificently described and the complications of serious illness at a high altitude camp, an accident, an avalanche, death, and subsequent descent are shown with

(continued on next page)



THE WINDSOR COURT BUILDING, designed by the early Australian architect Francis Greenway—"reverence of beauty is not often found where necessity rules"

N.Z. LISTENER, DECEMBER 24, 1954.