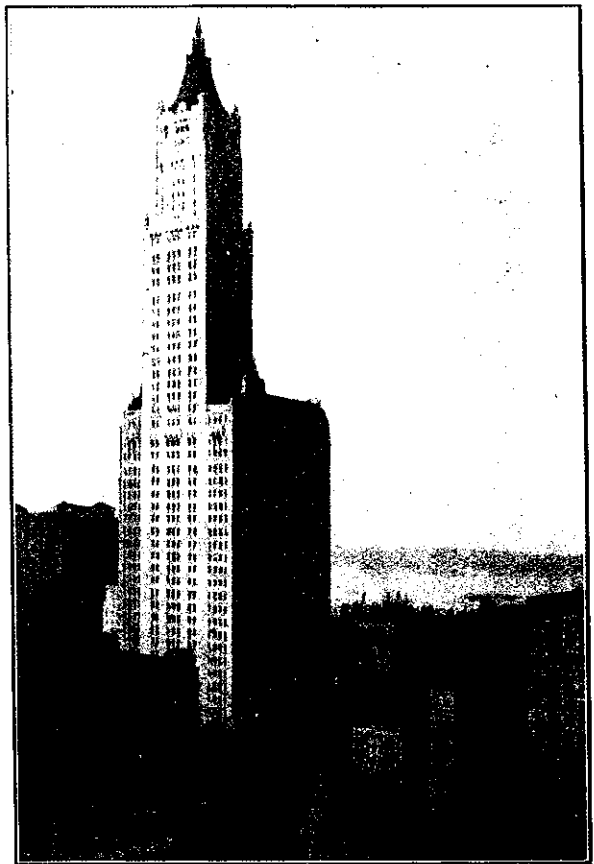


# The Period of the Sky-Scraper

The extent to which the Sky-scraper has developed in America during the last quarter of a century is one of the marvels of the age due principally to the use of structural steel.

The sky-scraper is so common in America that it is hard to believe that it has not always been there. Nevertheless it is but a youth of 27. "The steel skeleton was really born in 1889" says Professor A. D. Hamlin, of Columbia University, "but the year 1891 saw it accepted as more than a mere experiment, and we may say that from that year dates its definite adoption in American architecture." Professor Hamlin surveys, in a recent issue of "The Architectural Record" the achievements of this quarter of a century, giving a preliminary glance at the preceding quadremium, stimulated by the Centennial Exposition of 1876, from the "abysmal depths" to which architecture had sunk in the Civil-War period. That was the maturing period of Richardson, Hunt, Post, McKim, Mead & White, Ware, and others. But since 1891 there have been a hundred capable architects, says this authority, to ten of the preceding period. "The actual achievement has been vastly greater than in the preceding quarter century; its average performance is vastly superior, its greater masterpieces undoubtedly surpass those of that earlier time; the general public taste has notably risen to a higher level. But the earlier enthusiasm has largely evaporated. The requirements laid upon the architect have enormously increased the complexity of his task, and the struggle of competition has become intense beyond the limits of a generous and enthusiastic emulation." The influence of the steel structure may account for much of this, the writer regarding it as "the fourth of the great structural advances which have given architecture really new resources." These are the four:—"The Roman vault for the first time made vastness of unencumbered space attainable. The Gothic ribbed vault and flying arch and buttress created the masonry skeleton and made possible the majestic loftiness and airy lightness of the medieval cathedral: another new architecture was created. The metallic truss, developed toward the middle of the last century, permitted a wholly new spaciousness and lightness of construction. Our vast exhibition-halls, train-houses, and armouries would have been impossible without it; again a new architecture came into existence, hardly recognized as a new architecture. The steel skeleton, the last of the four developments, has brought into being a new loftiness and lightness of construction; it has freed architecture from the limitations of massive walls which had for ages kept it from soaring otherwise than in the frail and beautiful but practically useless form of the spire. We have not yet solved the problem of the ideal artistic treatment of the sky-scraper, but we have gone a long way toward it; and meanwhile our architecture has been endowed with wholly new resources and possibilities."

By way of presenting the progress made in building in the last twenty-five years, Professor Hamlin calls to mind some of the most noted buildings of the preceding quarter century:—"It is most instructive to read the late Montgomery Schuyler's *American Architecture*, published in 1892. The notable buildings described in this book were various works



THE TOWER O'ERTOPPING ALL.

Among the "omnipresent and insistent, the most conspicuous, revolutionary, and American architectural product of the last twenty-five years" the Woolworth building, designed by Cass Gilbert, rears its 750 feet above them all.

of Mr. Richardson: the three Vanderbilt houses in New York, insurance buildings in Minneapolis and St. Paul, a number of Romanesque houses in those cities and in Chicago: not much else. Mr. Richardson's death in 1886 was not yet so far in the past that his influence had wholly lost its power; but Mr. Schuyler notes how personal to him were the excellencies of his work, and deplores the weakness and ineptness of most of his imitators, who copied his