

The Architectural Value of Church Building Societies.

Churches and "Cheapness."

By Frank Peck.

Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam.

Until modern times this great phrase when used in connection with the erection, adornment and equipment of religious structures, could be applied with its full significance; and, furthermore, the phrase is not to be exclusively claimed by the Christian of any one sect any more than by the Pagan of Time immemorial: and only upon the acceptance of this as the true basis of giving—*ad majorem Dei gloriam*—is it possible to usefully proceed with this discussion.

Men in past ages have given of their best, produced in patience by personal effort and labour; for all lasting work, that which is worth leaving behind us, has been produced by *hard* work, the doer of which has been sustained, and his efforts tempered, by some degree of "love," which one is bold enough to believe is vouchsafed even to many an untutored savage, as one also sees it in the living animals of creation.

Men have raised buildings to worship in, some great and some modest; and "if they have put their heart into it" all their work of either grade is equally acceptable; and they have equipped them in the past with treasures—such as have been produced under religious fervour—which we who have inherited them have mostly found to be "above all price": and all was not weariness in the doing.

The material objects of nature with which we have been endowed, we must only consider as "a great entail," So John Ruskin says, and "only use them as they should be used," namely, in a manner directed by true study, education, and observation, which only will enable us to produce works sufficiently worthy to hand down to our successors with the true tradition and symbolism intact.

But why, it may be asked, is it necessary to write this preamble at such length? . . . The answer is, that we must illuminate the subject from the point of view of "values" in order to emphasise the greatness of the danger to the churches and chapels which are likely from now to be permanently built in our youngest Dominion, of their becoming the "dumping ground" for meretricious and unsuitable works, and to give warning to those who are ignorant of what has occurred in England and Europe, the irretrievable damage to the sacred edifices which has been done in the past, and to enlighten them as to the strong

organisations which were founded to combat these evils, which they have done with great effect.

In Europe from the earliest times until the period of their debasement, the Christian Church had inspired influenced and produced for the erection adornment and furnishing of its edifices, almost all that was best in art (and, we can almost say, greatest in constructional science). To the churches, as now, the populace went with receptive minds in peace and quietude to worship; and by listening and *seeing*, to learn and then carry away the axioms and mental pictures which shaped their whole lives.

In later days, culminating in the mid-Victorian era, our churchmen lost sight of the gravity of their responsibilities towards these fabrics (many of the old ones so magnificent originally), their furnishing, and equipment. Their interiors became the repositories for bad craftsmanship, especially in the form of modern brass, pulpits, screens, organ lofts, atrocious glass and "tailors' trumpery," the gifts in some cases of men well-meaning and earnest enough, who mostly acted, however, in ignorance of the real quality and object of their gifts, to which were oftentimes attached exclusive conditions based upon their individual judgment only. . . . Other donors were a class of purse-proud men perverse sometimes in intention, who, ensconced in state in the then "fashionable" high enclosed family pew—sometimes with its own fireplace—imagined that *money* could by itself provide the lasting and inspiring work of art acceptable for an edifice which, being tampered with, had already almost lost its original sacred "atmosphere."

These men, with few exceptions, built "cheaply," not well; and irremediably ruined many churches. "Vested interests" generally controlled the selection of the architect and craftsmen, who as a rule were without education in their subject, were ignorant of ecclesiastical art, its symbolism and tradition, and worked without devotion. The result was a "*dead architecture, than which nothing can be more depressing upon the minds and lives of a people.*" So, again, says the great sage. It behoves New Zealand, therefore, young in its architectural traditions, to take warning, and profit thereby.

And how, it will be asked, can such a serious menace of protracted materialism be combated?