ART IN THE STREETS.—III.

Distinguished art-writer like Mr. Ruskin could give an excellent idea of true art-principles even from so simple a thing as a street lamp. All the different patterns that meet our eye as we walk the streets seem to me false or poor. What they are intended to simulate, unless its be a post hewn out of wood, it would be hard to say. There is no attempt at a plinth. A lamp in Paris or Brussels is an elegant object, of a sort of bronze, tapering up, with a little half-raised decoration of leaves running round, and crowned with a pretty lantern. The lantern is the chief and all-important feature, the post being merely to support it. But here some kind of glass “thing” is perched on the top of a massive cast-iron pillar. Then this bulk is a waste of strength and emphasis. So, too, with the newly-introduced lanterns in the City, made in the shape of cylindrical cups out of one piece of glass. This was suitable in the case of the old oil-lamps hung out by a branch from the wall, and when the light was cast downwards; but here the absurdity has to be introduced of breaking a hole in the lower spherical surface to introduce the gas-jet. This clumsy device actually interferes with the light. But, indeed, the whole system of “street lamps” in London is in my opinion faulty, if tested by artistic rules. Surely to have a single little jet like a candle set up at intervals on high massive pillars, protected by lanterns, is a waste. Each should receive no other assistance than a branch from the wall. If a tall standard rises from the ground, it should bear something imposing: a cluster of lights and lanterns—a chandelier, as it were—to illuminate a large space. This would be not only more handsome, but more effective as an illuminator. It is such an arrangement that makes one of the attractions of the Place de l’Opera in Paris.

The lamps on the Embankment appear to be constructed on faulty principles, the most radical being the idea conveyed that the enormous piers which break the lines of moulded masonry at frequently recurring intervals were constructed specially to support these iron illuminators. This dwindles or makes trivial the effect of the long-stretching mass of granite, which, to have its full effect, should have been unbroken, or, at least, have been broken only at rare intervals. The lamps themselves are too trifling in their character to need such massive bases—as, indeed, the architect felt, for to make them harmonise he had to elaborate a massive iron base of dolphins, etc., from which the attenuated lamp-post rises like a pole with a ball at the end of it. To make lights and their supports an integral portion of a structure is a false system: they should be merely attached to it. By the existing arrangement one would suppose that the whole pier of the Embankment had been constructed for the purpose of erecting a row of lights. To see, however, the grotesque exhibited to its fullest extent, we have only to look at the gate-posts of Buckingham Palace, on which regular street lamps have been placed with an absolutely ludicrous effect. In churches in this country where lamps are used, they are hung from the roof by pulleys and a counter-
poise, like gasoliers, a complication that makes what might be elegant look clumsy. Yet abroad, in the Belgian cathedrals, a cord is simply run through a pulley in the roof, and the end secured to a pillar, the effect being as artistic as the arrangement is simple. Such are the lessons we can learn from such simple things as lamp-posts, which are so seldom ornamental and pleasant to look at. The makers need not be artists, but they should effectual as though it were a wall. The simplest form, therefore, is a set of bars wide apart, and the aim should be to have them of such a strength as will bear leaning against and handling, and of such space between as will allow a clear view, but without passage. The height, too, must be proportioned to the spacing, or the latter will appear narrower or broader, as if too long or too short. This is all very simple, and we can see it exemplified excellently in the elegant railings of the Tuileries Gardens. Upright bars tipped with gold are the principal feature, yet these are so nicely proportioned as to be infinitely more effective than more pretentious things of the kind. But let us turn to the ambitious and elaborate railing that decorates the old Temple Gardens. We are met by a heavy screen of metal-work so interlaced and crowded in pattern, that it seems rather a metal cage of wire-work than railing. It is frail and precarious, and looks as if intended to prevent a view of the gardens. Neither is there proportion between the supporting wall and the rail; and the whole, instead of having an airy, lofty appearance, with a certain elegance, as being in keeping with the charming gardens behind, has a dumpy, squat, overdone look. But what is this when compared with the flimsy bird-cage work that encloses the gardens of the Embankment! It can hardly keep on its feet, for it is planted like wire netting or fencing in the ground, instead of having a base of stone to rest on—an arrangement which keeps off the pressure of those outside most effectually, and allows them only to rest their hands on the rail. Indeed, all railing, like that of the Tuileries, should be architectural—that is, it should fill up the interval between stone piers, which thus form a proper support; but a long stretch of rail, supported only by stays, as the Hyde Park rail is, “can be toppled over in a moment.” We are told that the tracery and elaborate workmanship of the Embankment garden rail are ornamental. Yet all these ornaments are “stuck on,” and have no use—as is proved too well by the way in which they are being wrenched off, without damage to the general structure, by the passing little boy. It is a very flimsy, insecure arrangement; open work, yet close work, and all of cast-iron, and therefore brittle; and without dignity, because it suggests that what it encloses must be poor and trifling, since no more imposing balustrade was thought necessary to protect it.

Stood with a few of the principles here set out, the flâneur in the London streets will find
an easy and agreeable entertainment, and cultivate art at a small expenditure of trouble and at no cost of time, for he studies as he walks. Space does not permit us to do more than indicate a few of perhaps unsuspected, and certainly unobtrusive, treasures which London contains, and what is sadly to be bewailed, the well-known City Merchants' House in Leadenhall Street, an exceedingly interesting and curious specimen, with its courtyard, fine stair decorated with frescoes, noble carvings, and finely-proportioned rooms. Here lived the merchants of old days.

and which the wanderer will be glad to be guided to. The old artistic houses are fast disappearing. Within the last half-dozen years we have lost the so-called "Shakespeare's House" in Aldersgate Street, a quaint carved specimen; an old inn in Bishopsgate Street; the unique and singularly curious inn near Paternoster Row; the "Old Tabard" in the Borough (page 449); Sir Paul Pindar's House in Bishopsgate Street (p. 443) still remains, but has a precarious tenure. It must be crazy enough. It is like an old French cabinet, with its bow-window and rich carvings from top to bottom. It might be put in a museum, and is certainly very bold and effective in treatment. Close to Regent Street, in Mortimer Street, we come upon two richly-
carved houses which are even flamboyant in treatment, and which many have passed without a glance. The contrast between the pair shows what a variety of treatment can be effected in houses in a row.

But close to a monstrous pile which, like a tall bully, and a corpulent one too, lifts its head at the Broadway, Westminster, is the quaint Queen Anne’s Square, its houses so effective with their broad eaves and half a dozen curiously-carved doorways. The house in the corner near the crumbling statue is the most interesting. The strange collection of old carved faces let into the walls is worthy of a cathedral. These houses, however, are being “improved”—raised by a storey—and will soon lose all character. Not very far off is another delightful bit of old London. Passing down from the Wellington Barracks, we strike into York Street, near which we come upon a square of almshouses—Lady Dacre’s—relics of past times which, for picturesque decay and solitude, are worthy of the late Frederick Walker’s brush. Here we find a peaceful neglect, architectural design, bold shadows, and good iron-work. The pitch of the roof is excellent, the two little gateways admirable in appearance, though the centre entrance loses its effect from the protective railing being placed in front. Many, no doubt, in London have never seen this most effective bit. A little further on stands a sort of bluecoat school, a square small block of Queen Anne’s day. In our time the design of a small school-house is too often an embodiment of all that is mean and cheap and flimsy. But this has a dignity and an air of size far beyond its real capacity. It boldly represents what it means to be; and from the outside it can be seen that it is the shell of a hall which commands respect and interest. Indeed, Westminster is full of these old institutions—schools, almshouses—all more or less effective. How good, for instance, is the block of schools at the bottom of York Street, with its garden and enclosure, and general monastic air; its fine tiled roof and close black brickwork; crowned by the light and unpretending, yet not inelegant belfry! The art of making so plain a thing as a belfry or cupola seems to be lost now. The result is almost invariably mean, skimpy, or disproportioned. It is the same with clocks and clock-towers, which are scarcely ever effective. But these old relics are always judicious, simple, and good.

One of the most curious old mansions—original, too—will be found at the corner of Carey Street; its chief feature, a sort of annexe supported on pillars, rambling round the corner and down a narrow passage leading into Clement’s Inn. Its effect and general outline are so disfigured by posters, hoardings, etc., that it might pass unnoticed. It consists of a fine old tall brick house, with broad eaves and dormer windows; a good doorway, on which note the carved Cupids; while round the corner is this effective annexe, of rotunda shape, with its stout, compact, tiled roof and tall chimney. Altogether it must have been a very imposing residence. It is of course doomed, as well from its dilapidations as from its awkward contiguity to the Law Courts. This is a pity; for, if it were restored, it would be unique in London.

As one passes into Lincoln’s Inn, the side street that stretches to the right of Queen Street is worthy of a glance, from the uniform style of the houses, said to have been built by Inigo Jones. A sort of pediment runs across, supported by flat pilasters, between which are the windows. Here, too, is Newcastle House (page 444), a rather imposing specimen of the nobleman’s house, in the good old brick fashion and high roof.

About the centre of this row there are a couple of the stately gate pillars, once signifying a court behind, but now guarding a pretentious mansion with a semicircular porch supported on columns, rather original in design. We should note the newer hall, library, etc., of Lincoln’s Inn, which is in better taste than would be attempted now. But the new portion in Chancery Lane is very harsh and gaunt in colour and details. Let us hope the fine old gateway and its towers will not be disturbed, though they might be judiciously restored (page 445).

Few would believe what a wealth of art is to be found in such things as the doorways of old London houses. There is one district, itself quaint and old-fashioned enough, where they abound. This is the region near Gray’s Inn, where there are charming old-fashioned squares that have a sort of cathedral-close solitude. These are Queen and Red Lion Squares. In Queen Square is to be noted a curious old mansion, now the College of Organists; and passing on a little further we find ourselves in Great Ormond Street, where there are some rich and elaborate old doorways, well worthy a visit. They are quite Flemish in their decorative style, and strike one almost with astonishment. One in particular is worthy to be preserved in a museum. Gray’s Inn itself is quaintly antique, and the large gates in one of its inner squares are a specimen of fine and elaborate iron-work. Indeed, there are about London many admirable specimens of
wrought twisted iron-work. Even in Berkeley Square, on the side leading into Hill Street, there are some really artistic efforts, with old extinguisher frames for lamps, which the owners have had the good sense to retain. The houses themselves are of a good school, impressive and dignified, and are worth study. If we take a walk out to Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, we shall be well repaid, though here changes have taken place, and more are likely to be made. Not so long since, the houses were at the water's edge, a row of fine old trees intervening, so that the effect was like a bit of Dutch canal. But, indeed, the view there,

How feeble modern iron-work is in comparison! Witness the gates in Lincoln's Inn set up to the memory of Colonel Brewster; the large gate at a bank at Charing Cross, next to Spring Gardens; the gates for the Royal Academy; and those for the new Law Courts. There seems to be no eye for the bold lines, exactly suited to the material, which are so peculiar a feature of the old school of decoration in metal. down the river, notably where the green spire rises, is as melancholy and sad-coloured as any Dutch river scenery. How picturesque the old dilapidated bridge, with its strange hunchback design! Here, by the way, on the walk to the late Cremorne Gardens, opposite the boat station, stands a most remarkable and imposing building, now cut up into many tenements. The fine roof, the stately proportions,
the dignified windows, all point to a mansion of the greatest pretension, but whose history does not appear to be known. But in Cheyne Walk the iron gates, and the red pillars that support them, are worthy of a glance. Maclise's old house also deserved inspection before it was so greatly changed for the worse.

The Strand, for so important and busy a thoroughfare, is about the meanest street in Europe. Its houses are like those in a commonplace country town. Still, next door to the Adelphi Theatre should be observed two very quaint and effective little houses—effective in spite of their unpretending size. Passing up into Covent Garden we may learn a lesson in the art of disfigurement. Inigo Jones's noble Colonnade that runs in front of the hotels was a pleasure to walk under, and gave an expansion to the mind. It was like a bit of Venice. Now half has been pulled down and rebuilt on a larger scale. How unutterably hideous, too, is the iron and glass slanting roof raised over a portion of the old market, which, in its way, had a certain unobtrusive harmony that was in keeping. Nothing, indeed, shows the deficiency of artistic instinct more than the want of taste in dealing with iron and glass in constructing sheds. One would think that, with such airy and strong materials, and the patterns of interlacing branches in a forest to study from, something truly elegant and original could have been worked out. But there appears to be but one pattern—the invariable shed, half of glass, half of wood, with the girders and the skinny columns.

A picturesque effect can, however, be found in the Strand, hard by the new Law Courts. There rises the tower of St. Clement Danes Church (page 447), which stands awry, but is scarcely the worse for that. Of a winter's evening this church has a singularly charming effect, its fine proportions and original design being projected against a cold, calm sky behind, while it is made transparent by a glow of light within, the ringers being at work flinging the jangling chimes abroad in perfect riot. The old steeple seems like a Dutch one; and we think of old Sam Johnson, who used to attend here. Often have I gazed with delight on this scene, and on the fine outline and capital effect of this monument of good architecture.

I confess that the new so-called Queen Anne houses are not always satisfactory. In the new territory opened up at Prince's Ground architects have had great scope, but the result seems to be large masses of red brick, somewhat unshapely, and in which the strangest fantastic freaks have been played. The art of dealing with red brick seems scarcely understood yet. With so vivid a colour, walls must seem ponderous, unless the decoration be treated in a light and airy fashion. This it is that makes the small panes with the white ashes and framing a relief. The most successful houses are the tall, narrow, thin ones, on the Dutch model. A failure from excessive breadth may be seen in the great china shop in South Audley Street, which is one gloomy mass, though ambitious and full of endeavour after effect. We think in such cases of the epitaph on Sir John Vanbrugh—

"Lie heavy on him, earth, for he
Laid many a heavy load on thee."

When the necessity for building a large mass—say at a corner—entails a great display, it is worth while to give an idea of support by means of flat pilasters. At Cadogan Square the architect has, in some instances, taken a hint from the beautiful old house, before described, in Queen Street. Some of the houses on the Chelsea Embankment are strange freaks enough, but are pleasantly fantastic in their details, with their little balconies, niches, towerets, recesses, gables. Brick, however, is too precarious for such carvings, and in this climate projections are certain to decay and break off. The truth is, the bad material will not endure. The bent iron-work, however, is a great improvement, and pleasing to the eye. There is a house at Palace Gate, Kensington, hard by to Mr. Millais' new house, which, though one of the earliest built, is certainly one of the most effective. The frontage is narrow, with a bow going up to the top; the bricks, of two colours, very harmonious; the iron-work good; the detail abundant, yet not frivolous; the whole having a compact air of purpose that is really excellent. The only thing one might object to is the porch—an element with which strange pranks are played in this kind of house. This is caused by making the porch cover in the steps, and descend in the same slope over them, thus converting it into a slanting tube, while the arch of the porch seems to cut the door across. This has an awkward look, and the whole is not only dark but mean in effect; it results from an attempt at making the porch do a double duty, i.e., that of a shelter for those who wait at the door for the door to be opened—it's true office—and that of a shelter for those ascending the steps, a much shorter matter, and not worth the trouble of such a protection. The remedy, therefore, is to confine the porch to the door. In this house, however, there is another merit to mention, the admirable treatment of the
flank, which does not offer the mean barrenness of such things—a coarse expanse, very blank and raw—but is decorated in a plain and quiet manner. The niche in front, with its blue Nankin jar, is a welcome bit of colour; altogether this is a piece of satisfactory work.

It will be noted that small panes go well with this style of house; as, indeed, they would with nearly every style of house. This opinion will seem retrograde, but it is well founded. Vast panes of plate-glass impair the fashionable by the Brothers Adam, and suggest the Bath terraces which are made in the same style. But it would take long to enumerate the pleasant little bits, old and modern, that adorn London and its suburbs. At Clapton, for instance, is a most elegant and perfect Queen Anne mansion—now a school. Highgate has many such houses. We could dwell on the massive warehouses in the City—some of which recall the Genoese palaces—the fine old churches, and the invariable urban-tree.

architectural effect, suggesting the idea of open holes, as though the façade had not a smooth, protected surface. Indeed, even looking from within there is a sense of precariousness about these great sheets of glass, with loss of effect. In old churches, Flemish and English, how admirable is the effect of the network of cross iron in the long, gaunt windows, set in a whitewashed wall!

A portion of London that is falling into neglect is Bloomsbury and its neighbourhood; yet Fitzroy Square is worthy of a visit. Most of the houses, of stone, are in the style made which Leigh Hunt has declared can be seen from some portion of the street in every part of London. It has not been noticed that almost every new house in the business quarters of London is being built of stone, so that in a few years London will be rebuilt, and have a new aspect.

On these principles, here imperfectly indicated, we may pursue and cultivate "Art in the Streets." Each day and each new promenade will add to our store: we can compare, appreciate, or condemn as we go. But all the while we learn something.

Percy Fitzgerald.