Japanese Architecture and Allied Arts.*

The reader who takes up Mr. Ralph Adams Cram's "Impressions of Japanese Architecture and the Allied Arts" is likely to lay it down again with a sigh of regret that there is not more of it, albeit thick paper, wide margins, and the sixty full-page illustrations swell its proportions to a good-sized volume. Four of the ten chapters were written for architectural periodicals; one is a paper that was read before the Boston Society of Arts and Crafts. Necessarily, they deal chiefly with generalities, and there is some repetition, or rather reiteration, of the same ideas. This reiteration does not, however, detract from the charm of the book, and the ideas thus reinforced are sound and are cogently expressed. It is evident that Mr. Cram has studied his subject with painstaking care, keeping the larger relations ever in mind; and the essays that make up this volume are thoughtful and discriminating. He tells us that we must consider the art of Old Japan, and particularly the religious architecture, as the visible expression of the ancient civilization of China and Japan, which from the seventh to the twelfth centuries was the highest civilization then existing in the world. But, as he says, —

"From the standpoint of the casual traveller, even of the architect, Japanese architecture is at first absolutely baffling; it is like Japanese music, so utterly foreign, so radically different in its genesis, so aloof in its moods and motives from the standards of the West, that for a long time it is a wonder merely, a curiosity, a toy perhaps, or a sport of nature, not a serious product of the human mind, a priceless contribution to the history of the world. Partly by inheritance, partly by education, we have been qualified for thinking in one way, and in one way only. From Athens through Rome, Byzantium, the Auvergne, Normandy, the Ile de France, to Yorkshire and Somerset, there is running an easily traceable thread of unbroken continuity of architectural tradition; but from Athens through Ionia, Persia, Hindustan, China, and Korea, to Japan, while the line is equally continuous, it is through lands aloof and barred, and by ways that are blind and bewildering. We can think forward in the terms of the West, we can hardly think backward in the terms of the mysterious East. Yet when the revolution is accomplished and the rebellious mind is bent to the unfamiliar course, this strange architecture comes to show itself in its true light. It is more nearly Greek than any other, for it is the perfecting of a single, simple, and primitive mass by almost infinite refinements of line and proportion."

This is a significant utterance, not only from the novelty of the view put forth, — no other author having ventured an appreciation of Japanese architecture at its true worth, — but because it is the view that must prevail when that architecture is more widely studied. Still, as the Philistine in matters of art is not easily turned from his traditional notions, Mr. Cram's contention would be more convincing were more of the details filled in. These, let it be hoped, will some day be forthcoming. Meanwhile, there is reason to be grateful for a competent and illuminating summary of the historical development of the art, and some account of the more important buildings that have been preserved from ancient times.

All of the book is not given over to architecture. The chapter on "The Genius of Japanese Art" is a clear and forcible presentation of fundamental truths; the "Note on Japanese Sculpture" affords an excellent introduction to a much neglected subject; and very charming is the chapter on "Temple Gardens." In speaking of "The Minor Arts" there are lapses here and there into such extravagant phrase as "that from the very first whatever had been made by any workman had been beautiful." Would it were so! Strict regard for truth, however, compels the admission that not all Japanese workmen are artists. With little that Mr. Cram says is there occasion to quarrel. His spelling of "kakimono" (whatever that may mean) instead of "kakemono" will not pass muster. The color print by Yeizan, not "of Yeizan" as he puts it, is well characterized as "not a masterpiece." But when he asserts that "it says as much, perhaps all we can ever understand, of the pictorial art of Japan," the statement may be challenged squarely. The qualities he proceeds to comment upon are for the most part wanting in the print he takes as a text, and of which a half-tone reproduction is given. The other illustrations are from photographs, selected with excellent judgment, but they might have been better reproduced and printed.

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*Impressions of Japanese Architecture and the Allied Arts. By Ralph Adams Cram. Illustrated. New York: The Baker & Taylor Co.