

FOREWORD

When I was a King and a Mason—a Master proven and skilled—
I cleared me ground for a palace such as a King should build.
I decreed and dug down to my levels. Presently, under the silt,
I came on the wreck of a palace such as a King had built.

There was no worth in the fashion—there was no wit in the plan—
Hither and thither, aimless, the ruined footings ran—
Masonry, brute, mishandled, but carven on every stone:
“After me cometh a Builder. Tell him, I too have known.”

Swift to my use in my trenches, where my well planned ground-
works grew,
I tumbled his quoins and his ashlar, and cut and reset them anew.
Lime I milled of the marbles; burned it, slacked it, and spread;
Taking and leaving at pleasure the gifts of the humble dead.

Yet I despised not nor gloried; yet, as we wrenched them apart,
I read in the razed foundations the heart of that builder’s heart.
As he had risen and pleaded, so did I understand
The form of the dream he had followed in the face of the thing he
had planned.

When I was a King and a Mason—in the open noon of my pride,
They sent me a Word from the Darkness—They whispered and
called me aside
They said—“The end is forbidden.” They said—“Thy use is
fulfilled,
“And thy palace shall stand as that other’s—the spoil of a King
who shall build.”

I called my men from my trenches, my quarries, my wharves, and my shears.

All I had wrought I abandoned to the faith of the faithless years.

Only I cut on the timber, only I carved on the stone:

After me cometh a Builder. Tell him, I too have known!

—Kipling.

The contemporary reviews, art journals, literary magazines and the daily press are giving much space to the complaints of the art critics. In the interesting discussions that have been provoked by these sincere representations, efforts are being made to find the cause for a condition of the arts in America which is generally admitted to be backward. Some writers blame the teachers in the art schools and some lay the burden on economic conditions. It has been said, among other things, that the condition of the arts is more favorable in Europe because there the centralized governments are behind education and make provision for training in the industrial arts.

However this may be, I have not seen in any of these discussions a clear recognition of the fact that the arts can flourish only in a favorable atmosphere. An atmosphere that vibrates with the harshest and most hideous sounds from automobile horns and the most strident of whistles from locomotive and factory; an atmosphere that pulsates with outrageous noise and that magnifies ugliness in everything that meets the eye; an atmosphere that imparts a grotesque and vigorous growth to material things and that is wanting in the elements of which spiritual breath is composed, is not an atmosphere congenial to the culti-

vation of the arts. A frank recognition of this situation is the first step to be taken by those who wish to see improvement in art education in America.

The museums of the country, in facing these conditions, are establishing their own centers of influence, congenial to the artistic temperament, centres with an atmosphere in which artistic feeling finds nourishment and in which the senses are freed from oppression. The University Museum, in common with others throughout the country, realizes that this is one of its important functions, and in the discharge of its duty is bringing into close personal touch with its collections all who feel the desire and the need of its help and influence. More than that it is translating each object, no matter what its origin or its message, into terms that are intelligible according to the mental equipment of the individual beholder.

It is very unfair to blame the schools for the backward condition of the arts. More schools and larger schools are needed all over the country to do the kind of work that is being done by such institutions as the schools of industrial art and of design in Philadelphia, and it is the duty of the museums to make their collections accessible for practical utilization by the schools as well as for the public generally.

For the last five years or more the University Museum has been taking steps to inform that section of the public directly concerned that its collections afford an unusual opportunity for guidance in the designing of modern manufactures. We have repeatedly pointed out that the application of art as repre-

sented by traditional standards and historic precedents to fabrics of all kinds, to the products of the mills and the kilns of modern industry, is a lesson that has to be learned if this country is to hold its own even in a commercial sense in competition with the older civilization of Europe.

At this moment of singular significance in the world's history I desire to repeat this message with greater emphasis and to inform everyone who has an occupation in any way related to creative or productive activities, that the traditions of civilization and the standards attested by time are faithfully revealed in the Museum collections, and I wish also to call attention to the new arrangements which have been made at the Museum in the interest of the industrial activities along many lines which make Philadelphia a great manufacturing centre.

A staff of artists and instructors have been engaged to take charge of the general educational work for which the Museum is equipped, and especially to help visitors, including the artisan, craftsman, designer, merchant or manufacturer, to translate the collections into terms applicable to the work of each. It is the business of these instructors, whose guidance is at the service of the public at all times, to explain the design and workmanship that belonged to other times and places and to show how they may and ought to be adapted to modern American conditions and American ideals without in any way violating the essential fitness of things. These explanations or interpretations do not apply to the outward forms alone, but also to the

thought that lies within. There is in the Museum a great abundance of primitive design produced by the Indians of North and South America, the natives of Africa, the South Sea Islanders, the Indies and many Asiatic tribes. There are also many fine examples from the high civilizations of Europe and Asia, Mexico and Peru. In each division is to be found a multiplicity of attributes for the use of the designer, attributes that could not come into being except by slow stages under the labor of many hands informed by the thoughts of many minds and warmed by the hearts of many generations. This body of artistic creation, made available by the Museum, it is the privilege of America to appropriate and make her own for the good of the nation.

Generation after generation, the relations of form and ornament, following well defined lines of development, have in the life history of each people observed certain conventions, kept within prescribed boundaries and observed certain laws. These conventions, limitations and laws, far from being arbitrary, represent the conditions that are natural to normal growth. Whatever owes its existence to these conditions is legitimate and true, and whatever ignores these natural laws of development is false and insincere.

In the history of ornament, form is identified with ideas that give it force and eloquence, and without which it becomes cold and incoherent. In its history, decorative art does not express itself in "technique," but in articulate terms, and in the accents of a passionate utterance. The human associations that attach to

the conventions of form play the same part in ornament that human habitations with their legends play in reference to the landscape. A new country, howsoever fine its scenery, could never seem so beautiful as one whose villages may claim an unbroken tradition of a thousand years. That is because our sympathies are touched and our imagination is stirred by the one and not by the other. It is the same with ornament, and therefore design must follow tradition and conform to custom. That is why the Museum is the great educational factor that it is.

What I have said explains why good design cannot be created or invented, and why good form in relation to ornament is a matter of correct interpretation. The wasted efforts that are being made to satisfy the eye alone without reference to the imagination will never succeed in bringing forth a living body of decorative art possessed of an immortal soul.

Good design and good decoration, whether in architecture, textiles, pottery, floor and wall coverings or in any of the special or commonplace trappings of life, must be derived and not made. This does not by any means imply copying or imitation; it means suggestion, reconstruction, inspiration. The essential thing is that the properties of design be faithfully and intelligently derived. It is in this connection that the instructors on the Museum staff can be of great service to all who seek to utilize the materials for design that are afforded by the Museum collections.

In this our plan to open up more fully the resources of the Museum to the craftsman, the artist, the

designer, the merchant and the manufacturer, there is a complete recognition of the fact that the interests of the Museum are closely related to the interests of modern commerce and industry. In this co-operation our part will be to guide each effort in any line of production to the attainment of a successful decorative performance. By success I mean the adaptation of each product to the needs of the generations of men who will use it according to permanent standards of worth.

If I were to rest my argument on material advantage or monetary gain alone, I should fail to make my meaning clear, and yet I have no hesitation in affirming that the effort we advocate is becoming very largely a question of commercial efficiency and industrial stability. I prefer, however, to put greater stress upon another consideration, namely, the effect of a national artistic tradition on the national character and the richer experience that will be shared by everyone in the possession of such a tradition.

The influence that the Museum will exert on the development of design in this community and in America will be on behalf of discipline and restraint on the one hand, and of fresh inspiration on the other, combining its forces to produce something that may be expressive of the spirit of America and that will yet be faithful to the traditions in which American civilization has its roots. American art in the future may be new, but if it is to be worth anything it must have its background of legend.

In this connection it is well to state that American

industrial art has recourse to a supply of rich material for utilization that belongs peculiarly to its own province; I mean art and craftsmanship of the various native races of North and South America. It is very interesting to note that there is at present a distinct tendency among designers visiting the Museum to take their motifs from these native American sources.

It is being said that the life and legend of the Indian were marked by a rich spiritual experience in keeping with the vast continental spaces in which he dwelt for ages—the first of mankind to gain a knowledge of the gods that he recognized in forest and lake and mountain and plain of this his native land and yours: the first to live in close communion with them and to give passionate utterance to these themes in his native art. I have no doubt that the appeal that this utterance makes to many Americans and that attracts many designers instinctively to aboriginal American traditions in their search for fresh inspiration, has its source in the unconscious influence of nationality.

Perhaps, as some advanced artists claim, these very ancient and long cherished American themes, under the impact of a new civilization, may liberate a spark that will kindle an enthusiasm among Americans for whatever is true and beautiful in their everyday environment. It would be entirely in keeping if the energy thus set free, acting directly on native American design, recast in new molds and informed by European tradition, should prove a powerful agency in the production of an American industrial art with a character of its own.

Without discussing the merits of this or any other claim, I would only remark that the aim of the Museum is not to advocate any school or to emphasize the influence of any period or people, but to show the achievement of the whole world. As the expression of a composite nation it would be but natural if the new American Art should show a composite character. Those who seek inspiration or guidance will, according to taste or temperament, find it in the Chinese, the European, the Persian, the Indian, the African, or in some other section of the Museum. All of the collections are alike at the disposal of everyone, and it is our purpose to make them accessible, intelligible and useful to all. It is for the coming generation of Americans to utilize this material, to select, take apart, and reassemble in a way that will convey a message to the future. It is for some man or group of men to come forward and take the lead; the rest will follow.

G. B. G.