

HARTFORD'S NEW CAPITOL

THE BUILDING IN BUSHNELL PARK.

AN ORNATE ARCHITECTURAL PILE—STATUARY AS DECORATION—"THE TWELVE APOSTLES"—AN ARTISTIC BUILDING FOR LAW-MAKERS.

HARTFORD, June 28.—The Summer traveler, flying northward by rail, through Hartford, must needs see the architectural pile which stands on the upper edge of the green slope of Bushnell Park, east of the railway. It is a vast mass of white marble—this imposing structure—and in the dazzling sunshine of a New-England Summer noon it sparkles like a fairy palace of frost-work. Only the dark masses of its slated roof, and the bright bronze of the winged figure which crowns the dome, relieve the blinding whiteness of the pile. Of course, the traveler asks what this splendid castle, or palace, was built for, and he will be told—with an air of pity, if his interlocutor is to Connecticut born—that this is the new State Capitol. Unhappily, there is no order of architecture, no architectural profile which can define the purpose of any public building; and it is the practice of all architects to baffle the curiosity of observers by shaping a building which shall not reveal its uses without severe questioning. Ordinarily, the most costly and ornate structures which one perceives as he travels through a strange region of our beloved land may be safely guessed at as lunatic asylums. By common consent, States and counties squander their high art and their money in the decoration of buildings for the confinement of unfortunate people who are incapable of appreciating the splendors of their prison-house. And it is natural that the casual traveler should jump at the conclusion that Connecticut's Capitol is a magnificent asylum.

The structure, exteriorly, is sufficiently individual in character, although it gives no hint of its uses. The principal mass is a building about 300 feet long and 100 feet high. The sky line is broken by the tower and its crowning dome, rising in the centre, and by tall gables and pointed pinnacles which dominate its wings. The main building is about 200 feet deep, and its front is thrown out beyond the line of the wings boldly, and to the extent of 30 or 40 feet. The wings, again, are advanced far enough beyond the intermediate parts to give an agreeable diversity to the general effect of the entire front, which is thus capable of strong contrasts in light and shade. The roof is broken with dormer windows, and groups of finials on either side of the central tower leads the eye easily from the highest to the lowest points of the sky line. The tower, which is crowned by a dome, is 164 feet above the top of the roof; and from the ground to the top of the figure on the dome is a distance of 257 feet. The design of the building, which was the work of Mr. R. M. Upjohn, of New-York, is in the early Gothic, somewhat Americanized. The different faces of the structure are unequal in their artistic merit. The main front of the work, for example, gives an admirable general impression below the line of the roof. Severe critics, to be sure, might object to the protuseness of the ornamentation employed on the façade of the centre part, as compared with the extreme simplicity of the rest of the front. But this is not a grave fault, and it is so commonly seen in the work of the best designers that it would be hypercritical to make any serious objection to it. On raising the eyes, however, from the fine lines of the lower front to the roof, the breadth and massiveness of the main structure seem frittered away in the finicky gables and spires above. If the wayfarer is puzzled to guess the uses to which the building is to be put, he will most certainly ask of the tall and domed tower, what is it for? This feature of the building is a hexagonal structure, rising 164 feet above the highest part of the roof, and is crowned with a dome, bearing a winged figure in bronze, representing what is called "The Genius of Connecticut." It may be the Genius of New-Hampshire for all we can tell to the contrary, as no State in the Union has the exclusive right to any individual design for a guardian angel. This great and costly tower, so far as mortal man can see was built for the sole purpose of lifting to the skies the Genius of Connecticut, designed by Randolph Rogers, and cast in bronze, at considerable cost. To bear up a clock, or a fire bell, would have been to endow all this magnificence with some usefulness; but the statue if one could only see it near enough to study its features and proportions, is not a sufficient excuse for the tower, and, as if to emphasize the purely decorative purpose of all this marble and iron, there are set at each of the angles of the tower; at the base of the dome, 12 large statues in marble, cut after designs by J. Q. A. Ward. These are facetiously known to the inhabitants of the region as "The Twelve Apostles." In point of fact, they represent other geniuses than that of Connecticut, but to the eye of the most imaginative of observers, who sees them from below they convey no idea of anything more idealistic than the sugary figures on a confectioner's cake. Nevertheless, the outline of the whole building is good. If you are not particular as to meanings and uses in art, it is a satisfactory affair altogether. Most of the inhabitants hereabouts, probably, think it a very prett building; and I am sure that the architect must admire it very much.

It is evident that the new State-house was built from the outside. The designer was to that he must plan a building, to be constructed of marble, and to cost \$2,000,000; so he made a fine picture of a structure, something like this which stands in Bushnell Park, Hartford. The Legislature got at the designs and tinkered them here and there, and I believe that the State Capitol Commissioners tried their hands at this tempting business; for the never was a plan of a building, public or private, which could not be improved by some man other than he who designed it. The outer shell being completed, at least in imagination, the interior was planned to conform to what had been achieved for the gratification of the outside observers. In a case like this, the architectural picture must come first and the State-house afterward. Of course, there can be no central idea to such a structure. Outside, one sees a broad front of white marble, pierced with richly-decorated window openings, belted with bands of carved moldings, broken into agreeable shadows by advancing and retreating angles and towers, and crowned by a pinnacled roof which is surmounted by a dome-capped tower which dominates the pile. Nothing in all this suggests what may be inside. And when the curious visitor gets into it, he is constantly oppressed with the idea that the whole has been built from without. One is reminded of the man who builds himself a house by piling up a mass of stone and hollowing out the rooms afterward. The result, in this case, is a building which is fine enough to be a monument, and is too fine for a mere State-house. The splendors of the outside of this grand pile prepare one for equally gorgeous interior. But the result is somewhat disappointing. The State-house in Albany is merely fine exteriorly, but most magnificent within. The exterior of the Connecticut State-house is extremely plain, as compared with its outer glorification. Two large corridors crossing the building at right angles, intersect in the centre, and thus give a fine opportunity for striking architectural effects. Perhaps this is improved, but, at present, the space below the dome is boarded in and the clink of hammers within shows that something is being done to remedy the defects which have been discovered in the piers supporting the tower. Here and there, however, are visible among the passages which agreeably lead the eye to the perspective of the interior. The general effect is confusing, although it is petty, as it might easily have been. The outer approaches to the building are fine, even noble, but the inner staircases are not dignified at all. The fact that the modern elevators carry "the heft" of the Legislature to the upper floor should not have been used to the disadvantage of the staircases, and give the appearance which they have. Indeed, the whole interior plan is a maze, and the rural visitor unaccustomed to marble wildernesses, will fallibly lose himself whenever he attempts to ramble through the labyrinth without a guide.

Another confusing effect is produced by injudicious mixing of iron, granite, and marble in the interior finish. The metal columns are painted and decorated in a meaningless way, some of them being finished in color, and some in a faint imitation of silver or zinc, the latter being a lustrous gray. The granite columns are very fine indeed, and are the most numerous, there being 126 of them, and only 36 of the marble. The granite is a native product and when polished, as in these noble examples, it is an architectural material that is worthy the prominence which the architect of the building has given it. The wood finish of the interior is of oak, simply and solidly managed.

A liberal use is made of tiles, and the effect of this is pleasing throughout the building.

Without a diagram, it is impossible to describe the situation of the great rooms of the State-house—the rooms for which all this stone and iron was piled together. The Representatives' Hall is in the east wing, and it is reached by one passage, which suffices for legislators, dignitaries, pages, lobbyists, and any who may choose to come and loaf about the doors which lead abruptly from the common corridor to the place where law is wont to be made. The Hall of Representatives is lofty and elegant. Of course, it cannot for a moment be compared to the Assembly Chamber at Albany—that vast vaulted room, which is a monument if it is not anything else. But the Connecticut law-makers have a chamber which is big enough and handsome enough to meet the needs of generations of legislators, whatever may be their future attainment in all that makes a Legislature great. The hall is 84 feet by 56 feet, and has the somewhat disproportionate height of 48 feet. This great height was ordered by the all-knowing Legislature, and it involved a material alteration of the architect's plans. The floor was lowered several feet, in order to get the height which the legislators in their pride thought requisite for the proper ventilation of their eloquence. The consequence is that the speakers find great difficulty in being heard, and the lowering of the floor has necessitated the closing up of the heads of a series of arches in the *porte-cochere* of that wing of the building. Various expedients have been tried to deaden the reverberations of the hall, but none have been effectual, and it is actually proposed to lower the ceiling to the same extent to which the floor has already been lowered. Possibly the members may "get the hang" of the chamber by and by, and thus be spared the mortification of confessing that they do not know as much about architecture as Mr. Upjohn does. Two rows of windows, high up in the walls, give ample light to this hall. The desks, 250 in number, rise in a semicircle from the amphitheatre before the desks of the presiding officer and clerks. The prevailing tint of the decoration is rich and sombre, and the general effect is highly agreeable. Behind and over the Speaker's desk is the gallery for spectators, a somewhat contracted arrangement, and ingeniously contrived so as to limit the view of the visitors to a contemplation of the walls of the opposite side of the chamber. The effect in the gallery, with the oratory of the unseen members rising in the vast spaces over their heads, must be quite peculiar. The wood used in the construction and finish of the furniture of the Representatives' Hall is mahogany, which, relieved by the prevailing tone of dark olive and bronze greens on carpets and walls, gives a dignified expression to the room.

The Senate Chamber is the most satisfactory apartment in the entire building. It is finished in solid oak, and is enriched with some of the most admirable carving ever executed in the country. The chamber is 50 feet by 39 feet, and is 37 feet high, or about 11 feet less than that of the Representatives' Hall. Two small galleries for spectators run across either end of the chamber, their fronts being paneled and ornamented with fine carving in high relief. The desks of the Senators, 30 in number, are arranged in parallel rows at right angles with the line of the desk of the presiding officer, and in a line with the gallery fronts. The light is obtained from high windows filled with stained glass, and duly shaded, so that the medieval character of the room is greatly enhanced. As in most of the apartments of the State-house, admirable taste has been shown in the selection of the carpets for the Senate Chamber. The result is a harmony of color and tone most pleasing to the eye.

Generally speaking, the interior finish of the building, so far as upholstery and wall decoration are concerned, is eminently satisfactory. The library, a handsome room 55 feet by 85 feet, however, gives one the impression of a big hall without much in it to make a library. The book-cases are dwarfed by the great height of the room, and the effect of a hall is added to by the baldness of the noisy tiled floor. Almost the only pictorial decoration in the State-house is the valuable collection of portraits in this library. These portraits are of the Governors of Connecticut, from the colonial times to the present. They are not only interesting, but, for the most part, are very good pictures. At the entrance of the main corridor of the building is a replica of one of Trumbull's historical pictures, and a model of the Genius of Connecticut which surmounts the dome—objects which command the wonder and admiration of the wide-gaping rural visitor.

The Capitol is presumed to dominate the park in which it stands. In point of fact, its ground line is three or four feet below the highest part of the park. If the building had been set 100 feet back from its present site, it would have been on the highest point of the ground allotted for it. With the same happy facility for picking up afterthoughts which has lowered the Representatives' Hall and now seeks to lower its roof, the authorities are cutting down the hill on which the Capitol should have been built. This unfortunate error has also left the building where its lower part is cut off from the view of those who pass by the park on any side. From the main front, except at a distance, the effect is very bad, as the swales of the park cut the feet of the building, so to speak, clean off at the ankle joint; and, instead of resting firmly on a substantial foundation, the vast structure seems floating in the air. It has been proposed to give a more dignified approach to the east front of the building by raising the street at that point—a proposition which has evolved much local acrimony. One of the Park Commissioners, Mr. Charles Dudley Warner, has as good as said, in his paper, that the Board of Aldermen are ignoramuses, and they have retorted by asking him to resign. It is generally conceded that this local dispute will not seriously deteriorate the artistic quality of the building around which it rages.

The people of Hartford are naturally proud of their new Capitol. They have a right to call it theirs. They have contributed largely and directly to its cost, as no other community has done, and they are now, at some considerable expense, beautifying the grounds around it. If the present plans are carried out, the building will ultimately have the best situation and the most delightful surroundings of any similar structure in the country. Although a series of misadventures in the fixing of the original location of the Capitol have destroyed some of the natural beauties of the park and have made needful an expenditure which should have been avoidable, the general effect of the grounds, so far as these are accessory to the plans of the architect, can be made highly satisfactory. Some noble old trees, in the rear of the building, have been left to give it a good background, and a grove at the west end curtains a stream which winds far down at the foot of the declivity below, and affords an umbrageous retreat in which the local statesman may meditate, and the swains of Hartford whisper their vows to the moon—inconstant or otherwise.

I ought to say that the decoration of the building, in the matter of sculpture, crystallizes local traditions and history. The Charter Oak is sculptured in one of the tympana on the east front, John Trumbull and Roger Sherman appear in marble effigy on the same front, and medallion likenesses of Horace Bushnell and Noah Webster are to grace the same façade. There are 34 of these medallion blocks scattered over the surface of the exterior, and 22 pedestals and canopies enrich the walls at various points. It will be seen, therefore, that the architect has left abundant space for the Genius of Connecticut to perpetuate the memories of her great men and of the historical events which have marked her progress. It is to be hoped that the statesmen who are to control this branch of the decoration of the Capitol will not be in a hurry with their important work. If it should be found that the supply of ancient worthies is not likely to hold out until the niches and pedestals are all filled with the busts and statues of men who have a right to be thus honored, they may reflect that we are making history as fast as our fathers did. If the legislators leave some of the monumental busts and storied urns for the next generation to provide, who can say that their forbearance will not be rewarded in marble?

If beauty is its own excuse for being, I suppose the new Capitol, costly as it is, is amply satisfactory to the people of Connecticut. If it was worth while to build a monument to illustrate to all coming time the wealth, taste, and prosperity of this generation, then the building of this splendid pile will not be wholly in vain. But, as at Albany, there is such a sense of the inharmoniousness between the structure and its occupants—the legislators—that the first feeling which comes over one who thinks of the outer architectural beauty and the inner human mediocrity is that so much high art and so much money as are here expended might have been better employed. What is the use of building a palace in which to make laws? This is the question which many people are asking. The obvious answer is that it is worth while to educate the people by the construction of highly artistic buildings and monuments. Perhaps some rural legislator, enraptured by this crystallized dream of architecture, will go home and tear down his hundred-year-old farm-house, to replace it with a lath and plaster bungalow, in the Americanized early Gothic manner; or the Legislatures of other States may build their insane asylums after this design, in generous rivalry of Connecticut. But the new Capitol is not, after all, fine enough, or nearly perfect enough, to be a high educator of this generation or the next. It is not a failure unless this is being a failure.