

served his apprenticeship in a nigger-minstrel troupe. The whole business went with a roar from beginning to end: the sentry a triumph of burlesque. Hamlet now came to the rescue of tragedy. He temporarily effaced the sentry, and had a confidential chat with the ghost, who appeared in a coffin-like apparatus and shroud complete, and was finally interrupted by the comic minstrel, who had a farcical fit, collapsed, and brought the scene to a riotous close with a yell of delight from the rapt spectators.

After the sentry's success, it was difficult to settle down to anything less exhilarating. However, Claudius realized the difficulty, too, and rose to the occasion by ordering a dance of the Salome variety in full Court. He, meanwhile, continued his gastronomic exercises. By this time Laertes had dropped in and was evincing a keen interest in the domestic concerns at Elsinore. Claudius had lent him the Rear Admiral's outfit, and altogether the sartorial arrangements at the Danish Court were adaptable if curious. Following the terpsichorean *entr'acte* a quite different dog appeared on the scene, sniffed round, gazed at the audience, and bolted.

Next came a scene between Laertes and Ophelia's two lady friends. Laertes appeared to be making love to them both, and they reciprocated with many blandishments and pleasantries. A certain amount of horseplay and low comedy was indulged in, and Laertes eventually retired with one of them. The whole scene went splendidly, and we were beginning to wonder whether we were not showing scant reverence for Shakespeare by witnessing one of his immortal works in complete ignorance of its mysterious and hidden meanings, when our minds were suddenly made up for us by the appearance of Hamlet. He broke into song,

and was brutally cursed by the ghost from without in words that sounded so like 'Mister Bottomley' that we fled from the theatre. P.

Kisil Robot, February, 1919.

The Manchester Guardian

ART AND THE MECHANICAL

BY BRIAN BRUCE-WALKER

ONE often hears it said concerning this modern world that it has little or no beauty because it is machine-ridden. Machinery itself and machine-made articles have, we are told, an inherent ugliness that stamps itself on the industry of to-day and spreads unchecked into every detail of our environment. And our philosopher, speaking, let us say, on a railway platform, is able to wave his arm sweepingly to a network of metals, bristling signals, panting locomotives, and gaunt girder bridges. But he will be seriously annoyed if the train he awaits is a few minutes late.

However, we feel there is justice in his complaint, if the things that so pain his artistic eye are not even perfect in efficiency. But is the attitude right? Is it so great a torture to our æsthetic souls to look along those gleaming sweeps of parallel bars as to gaze down some squalid vista of dwellings in the East End? Is it the shapes of our surroundings that depress our spirits so much as the prevailing tone of grime? Are those girders so very ungainly; or would we not at least rather see more of them and less of the self-assertive hoardings that rear their garishness from every unused corner of the landscape?

Yet did we not most of us in our early youth roam forth from the warm comfort and tidy trappings of the home to some blackened bit of waste land above the railway cutting, or down

the mire of the dock-side amid trucks and cranes and ships? Nor was this any budding mechanical genius. Even classical scholars must confess to such juvenile wanderings. It was beauty that bewitched us, the beauty of motion and the beauty of hard, strong lines that speak of purpose.

And has that fascination faded as our minds have matured? Do these things truly now leave us cold as do the tin travesties of them with which we then littered the nursery floor? Or do we turn from them to our newspaper only because we have come to think the divorce suit of Lady Diddle-duck more worthy our grown-up consideration than the appearance of the world that makes and is made by us?

I think the child-mind is right — because unprejudiced — in this as in most artistic things. But it is requiring painters and writers who have outgrown even the childishness of middle age with the thoughts of profits and bank balances that strew its mental nursery floor, to reveal to us the splendid sternness of the girders black against a sunset, the majesty of factory chimneys, the clean grandeur of a gun. These harmonies about us are not apparent until the artist points them out. May that not be because, reared in the conventional thought of the time, we are never asked to look around us for beauty, except indeed by our natural instinct, soon to be suppressed by custom and education?

My point is this. A landscape untrammelled by man's habitations or roads can be beautiful. So can a scene of docks and cargo boats, engines and warehouses, untrammelled as it is by any of man's efforts at decoration. But what artist wishes to reflect samples of the architecture of every day? Who would buy a picture of a middle-class suburban road, of a West End

square, of our local high street, or the new public house in an old-world town? A painter would sooner select the flat façades of a slum alley with the little street dramas compressed between them. The reason, I venture to suggest, is that the former things have all a pretension to elegance. They are all embellished in some way, the villas with ornamental porches and modestly decorated bay windows, the square with its railings (blessed symbol of privacy) fashioned with respectable elaboration, the fronts of the shops and 'pubs' blossoming into floral-patterned tiles and carved woodwork that may or may not be overwhelmed in the flood of placards that swirls into every little channel of modern commerce.

But none of these embellishments have any meaning; they have no relation to the structure or function of the things they decorate. At best they are ghosts of feudal pomp looking out upon the industrial welter of today. But the mediæval baron did not decorate his castle or surround it with fancy railings and notices about trespassers. He had towers that were grand because of their battlements to shield the archers and their massive ness to withstand the battering ram; he had a moat and a portcullis that worked. He kept decoration or his flag and his shield, and then he did it generally with some symbolic meaning.

Those grand redoubts have little in common with the more commensurate modern architecture of steel bridges and railway station domes with their pathetic bits of ornament stuck on to the vital structure. These erections are only impressive when shamelessly utilitarian, when, free of trappings and formed to the dictates of efficiency of design and economy of metal, their naked strength has a

weird majesty, weird because we feel we are but beholding the roots of a new mode of beauty, the flower of which has not yet blossomed.

But some things born of modern industry have the true dignity of design in which thought has been exercised in the moulding of form to both beauty and purpose. And we may take, I think, as the best sample and symbol of such study and labor toward perfection, the steamship. There is no attempt at decoration throughout a ship, nothing, that is, in her outward appearance, and it is not the elegance of her cabins that gives a ship her individuality and wins that almost personal affection from her crew. The smooth lines of a ship's hull are born of thought for speed and strength, and the superstructure of a liner is a great lesson in the new architecture that is possible with the light framework so easily wrought in the steel works of to-day. It is because the lines of a ship's hull must conform to mathematical laws and because a uniformity of method is observed in building the rest of her that she is good to look upon. This is why other engineering structures, bridges, cranes, locomotives, gasometers even, have a certain fantastic attraction of form though not nearly so chastened to dignity as the ship because not so restrained by conditions.

It is strange that the connection of beauty with mathematical relationships is so little noted when Nature is saying the thing to us in her every act. It is the tapering of a bough in perfect conformity with the cantilever stresses, the moulding of a stag's thigh to accommodate the powerful muscles most compactly, that give these things their fine outline. Also each species, with its particular needs, develops in a particular style—has character. There is an 'oakiness' about an oak, as some

people have put it; and various modern schools of painting strive to express this on canvas.

But when will our shops express a true well-ordered shopiness and our houses an attractive homeliness, just as our ships have a ship-shapeliness and our aeroplanes an airiness? It will be, I think, the time when architects no longer endeavor to make 'an Englishman's house his castle' in appearance, but knows it for a cozy nest, and when the shopman will want his various wares to look forth from a setting that advertises well their character and worth without the need of vulgar, clamorous placards.

Of the larger modern constructions railway stations are, perhaps, as entering to the greatest extent into our daily environment, the most deserving of study to make that environment pleasanter. If only they could be rid of that eczema of advertisements, and if only their builders would not put on cast-iron capitals and bent iron work as an afterthought when they have satisfied themselves that their steel pillars and tie rods are up to strength, stations could be really majestic edifices. There are no traditions yet in steel building work; the complete fusion of beauty with efficiency has yet to be discovered. But when it comes you may be sure that it will emphasize the characteristics of steel, the slightness of the tension members, the fine curves of girders made in conformity with the stresses, just as all builders in brick have made the most of the arch. The ugly duckling in the nest of architecture may yet grow to be more graceful than his elder brethren.

Can trams and omnibuses ever be made beautiful and expressive? Merely strip them of advertisements and I think you will find at least a qualified affirmative. The use of quieter tones and of lines and panelings that make

room for, instead of being masked by, the route and destination boards, might bring about something quite attractive. Already there is one detail of the 'General' motor 'buses that is a striking illustration of the principles urged in this article. The web-like casting of the spokes of the back wheels was no doubt planned to take all strains with the minimum of weight, but a design of pure beauty has resulted. Some day, perhaps, our public vehicles will be as graceful as gondolas. Private touring cars are now, in fact, pointing the way.

Modern civilization has still the awkwardness of growing years, and the best we can do at present is to let its strong sinews show their vigor finely forth. But some day it will reach maturity, and a noble culture, balanced in scientific and artistic effort, will shine out from all the habitations of man and the instruments of his full and varied life. And if the magnificent styles of Greece and Rome are never to live again because their methods have been surpassed, something new and wonderful and maybe just as grand will show itself, while to life then will be added joys all unrevealed to the ancients, the cult of travel and the beauty of motion.

The Outlook

CHARLES PÉGUY

BY WINIFRED STEPHENS

THOUGH of no French author who fell during the war so much has been written as of Charles Péguy, the last word on this unique personality remains unsaid. M. Halévy's book, however, affords an invaluable insight into one of the most interesting phases of French literary life in the decade before the war. It was a phase that closed when Charles Péguy put up the

shutters of his little office in the Rue de la Sorbonne and went away to meet his death in the Battle of the Ourcq. I remember, only a few weeks earlier, going into the back parlor of that shop, and, after a few words with the insignificant-looking little man, who was so soon to die like a hero, paying my twenty-five francs subscription to the *Cahiers de la Quinzaine*. I never received a *cahier*. None ever appeared after that. But it was worth many times twenty-five francs to have been, if only for a few minutes, face to face with one of the most original writers of the century, whose works express the ideals and aspirations for which the best of the combatants in the Great War have laid down their lives.

The complete biography of Charles Péguy could hardly be published during the lifetime of certain of his contemporaries. And M. Halévy, who is mainly concerned with the author's work and the opinions out of which it grew, attempts no more than a few biographical notes here and there. He tells us something of Péguy's parentage and upbringing, and of his wonderful mother. I do not know whether scientists can explain it, but, while in clever women it is generally the father's mentality and influence which dominate, in clever men it is almost invariably the mother's. It would be difficult to exaggerate the debt Péguy owed to his mother. It was she, for instance, who instilled into him his passion for the revolution. Her humble calling is — for she has survived her son — to let out and mend chairs in the church of St. Aignan at Orléans. The technical skill, which is so characteristic of her race, has made her quite a famous adept in the art of chair-mending and enabled her to accumulate a modest competence. M. Halévy might have