

# EVENING TRANSCRIPT

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17, 1887.

## STUDIES IN BOSTON ARCHITECTURE.

### Some Characteristics of a Boston Gentleman's City Home.

[On a corner lot, in what the house agents would call a "most desirable location," having a narrow frontage on a broad, handsome street, and a broad frontage on a more narrow side street, stands a dignified dwelling of brick and Longmeadow sandstone, five stories high, which the architects, Peabody & Stearns, have designed for one of their clients. The house is very simple and sensible in its exterior proportions and in its interior arrangement. The most conspicuous feature of the design is a very large circular tower on the corner, which rises to a steep conical roof of red slate tiles and dominates the whole building. The entrance is on the side street, mainly because there is a chance to light the hall on that side. There is some carving on the stone work above and beside the street door, but it is in very low relief, and hardly affects the general absence of ornamentation and almost severe simplicity of the house. The tower and the tall chimneys, a single dormer in the front roof, a bay of shallow projection just above the entrance, and two steep gables on the side street—these are the constituent elements of an elevation of admirable solidity and distinction.

Within, very much the same characteristics will be found. It is remarkable with what strides taste has gone forward in the last decade, and probably there is nothing which shows the gain more plainly than the interiors of good houses in town and country. The house now in question may be regarded as a finished type of the very best of American city houses. It is vastly comfortable, pleasant, cheerful, luxurious, even, but not in the least in an ostentatious way; and, above all, it has that which palaces, as a rule, have not—namely, a homelike air, an interior which suggests refinement and leisure.

The abundance of daylight is a merit which places this house considerably above the plane of most residences in this quarter. The corner lot has been of this advantage—which is not often so well used—that the numerous large windows pierced through the round tower not only admit to the front rooms a flood of wholesome sunlight from the southeast and south, but also give the inmates a remarkable street view in all directions. Besides the large bay window, which lights the halls of the ground floor and the first story as well as the stairway, there are many windows giving on the side street, and a large skylight. Stained glass has been employed very sparingly.

The hall is really a hall, and not an entry. It is reached from the street door by passing through a wide vestibule and up a few easy steps. The wood finish is of polished oak, in panels. Opposite the entrance is a great brick-lined open fireplace, with a low, wide arch, in a large alcove, all of oak; and at the right of the entrance begins the oak staircase, which has four easy stages and three restful landings, over the largest of which is the bay window above mentioned. The stairway is extremely handsome. The balustrade is a simple square lattice-work pattern of thick square oak bars, and at the outer corners of the large landing are square panelled posts. In the upper hall the posts are fluted and have capitals, and there are corresponding pilasters at either end of the hall. The ceilings are heavily beamed after the Renaissance fashion, and all the lines are angular and straight, except where the first-floor hall overlooks the stairway, and a slight swell, like the pretty midships bilge of a boat's hull, makes the balcony-like edge of the hall, with its stout balustrade, a thoroughly graceful and pleasing detail, as seen either from the stairs or from the wide landing. Above the high-panelled oak wainscot which lines the halls and stairway is a hanging of canvas, of a rather dull reddish color, which serves as a congenial background for several large oil paintings, among which, by the way, are some fine specimens of native art.

The front room on the ground floor is the library, and it is finished in mahogany, having low bookcases of that material along the side, and a large fireplace faced with Mexican onyx and surmounted by a richly carved mahogany mantelpiece. Above the wainscot and the bookshelves respectively is a figured hanging of the stamped canvas known as Tynecastle tapestry, in subdued tones. Above this room is the parlor or drawing-room, which is delicately finished in ivory white and gold. The dining-room, also on the first floor, is a nobly proportioned oak apartment, with a huge fireplace at the north end, a beautifully carved buffet at the west and a row of windows at the east side. The fireplace is backed with iron castings, in which a relief designed by the architects ingeniously represents a big salamander surrounded by flames. The facing is of Brescia marble. The doors and panels of the buffet are, as has been said, carved in excellent taste, with cupids and flowers and vines, quite in the purest Renaissance spirit. On either side of the fireplace are small, narrow windows filled with stained glass.

The three stories above this are reached by stairways running up from the west side of the first-floor hall—that is to say, from the side opposite the fine stairway which has been mentioned. The stairs continue to be of oak, which is used throughout the halls also all over the house. The balustrade is like the colonial work in this line. It has those graceful, slim balusters formed in various modifications of the spiral or corkscrew principle, which lend such a quaint and delightful aspect to many of our pre-Revolutionary houses.

Intelligence marks the arrangement of the sleeping-rooms, the dressing-rooms and the servants' quarters, in the same degree as it stamps the designing of those parts of the house which have been imperfectly described here. Of all the devices that ingenuity and skill may provide to make a home agreeable and beautiful, none are wanting. No house, it may be supposed, is perfect; but this, which has been very inadequately suggested, seems to unite within itself a rather extraordinary array of the essential merits of a good example of domestic architecture.