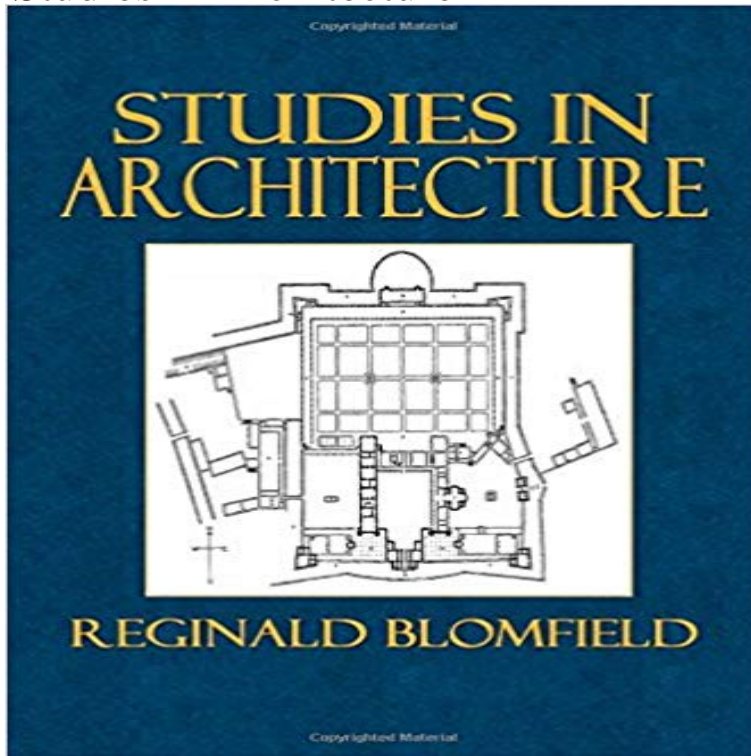


Studies in Architecture



THE resuscitation of these half-dozen slightly connected essays, which Mr. Blomfield has collected from the Quarterly Review and the Architectural Review, and entitled Studies in Architecture, results in an informing book which may be perused with profit by any intelligent reader, but especially by the professed student of architecture. Excepting the first essay, it is a book mainly about architects certain architects as personalities seen through their architecture and their writings. To find the man in his architecture seems, according to the author, to be the problem for the critic. After all, he says, the vital interest of architecture is the human interest. To this point he addresses himself, aiming at recalling the fact that architecture is a difficult art... not a mystery, but an expression of the human intelligence... capable of the same critical analysis as any other imaginative and intellectual effort. For shortcomings in this endeavor he pleads the limited opportunity possible to a writer whose principal work lies elsewhere. Among the fifty illustrations are ten reproductions of sketches from Mr. Blomfield's own pencil, delightful in drawing and masterly in their handling. Some twenty more of the plates are from photographs, most of them excellent for their purpose. Addressed with more serious intent to architects, as experts in building-work, this book might be put into a higher category altogether; for it contains lessons that need to be driven home to architects in particular, and can be rightly enforced only by the authority of an architect. The first essay, entitled Byzantium or Lombardy, opens with the remark that modern architecture seems incapable of progress except in a circle. Having exhausted our classical tradition and got over our devotion to Gothic architecture, we now see men transferring their studies to the obscure period of post-Roman architecture which preceded

the art of mediaeval Europe. Each of the various Italian writers on this subject seems to have been directing his best efforts to demolishing the work of his predecessors, besides being too fond of theorizing without consideration of the buildings themselves, summing up, so to speak, before mastering the evidence; a failing, one might observe, not rigidly confined to Italian book-writers on architectural history. One recent writer, Signor Rivoira, with patriotic zeal propounds the theory that Western architecture of the eleventh and twelfth centuries (generally known as Romanesque) is descended in unbroken continuity, through the work of Italians presumably Lombards at Ravenna in the fifth century A.D., from the architects and builders of Imperial Rome; that it was in fact the creation of Italy, not of Byzantium. As for Byzantine-looking features and details found at Ravenna, these may have been executed by Greeks working for local designers and builders; a theory which appears to Mr. Blomfield entirely to miss the very real and far-reaching difference between Byzantine architecture and Romanesque, a diversity in kind that there is between S. Vitale and S. Apollinare Nuovo. He finds in Signor Rivoira's work too little attention given to plan and construction. It is here that the hand of the amateur is apparent; for architecture is a difficult subject, and this aspect of it can only be handled by architects. And, further, he says: To my mind the vital distinction between styles and periods in architecture is to be found, not so much in details as in planning and construction, in the underlying thought. We do not find any such principle of classification laid down in Signor Rivoira's work. In his anxiety to find the origin of mediaeval architecture in Italy, he claims a single origin for the basilica plan of the Western church and the totally different plan of the domed church of the East. Royal Institute of British Architects Journal

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