

EVENING TRANSCRIPT

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 1887.

TRIPLE SHEET.

STUDIES IN BOSTON ARCHITECTURE

II.—The Residence of Mr. Eugene R. Thayer on Commonwealth Avenue.

The private residences of many modern dwellers in cities have this much in common with the palaces of the Moors, that they present to the world a severe and simple exterior, which gives very little suggestion of the riches of form and color within. Domestic architecture proceeds upon the assumption that every man's house is his castle, and even the forms which had their origin in feudal times, when one's neighbor might be expected to call, with an army at his back, prepared to lay siege to the fortress, have been more or less happily adapted to the needs and tastes of this more peaceful era. It has been the subject of remark that the variegated architecture of the Back Bay has a general aspect of simplicity, as seen from the street, which forms a striking contrast with the elegance of the interiors, and this is, with a few exceptions, true. Display is avoided, as a rule, and many of the most remarkable houses produce an outward effect of massive but plain and modest proportions. In describing the artistic homes which have been built lately in this quarter, it will therefore be necessary to explain in greater detail the arrangement and decoration of the interiors, where the taste and skill of architects and decorators have been afforded a wide field, and in many instances have been exercised so successfully that it would seem almost a pity not to contrive a public acknowledgment of such gratifying æsthetic triumphs.

Among the new houses lately built on Commonwealth avenue which are worthy of especially careful attention, that of Mr. Eugene V. R. Thayer, on the northeast corner of the avenue and Gloucester street, may fairly claim a large share of distinction. The architect is Mr. John H. Sturgis of this city. This residence, which is not yet completed, covers an unusually large space of ground, having a frontage of forty-six feet on the avenue and of eighty-one feet on Gloucester street. It has four stories and a basement, and the materials used are Longmeadow sandstone and pressed brick. The basement and first story have walls of the stone alluded to, which is a warm, reddish-brown stone, with uncut face, above the first story the walls are of brick; and the roof is made of blue-black slate tiles. The style of the architecture is a modernized French renaissance. Two swells or bays run from the ground to the roof on the avenue front. The steep slate roof is broken by numerous dormers faced with the same stone employed on the first story. The entrance is on Gloucester street. On this front there is a swell extending only to the second floor, north of which comes a square-cornered projection marking the line of a gable; still farther along is a circular staircase-turret rising to a conical slate roof; next to this is the wide main entrance, and finally an octagon bay.

The front on Commonwealth avenue is dignified, quiet and simple in effect. It has but little carved work. That on Gloucester street is more picturesque and diversified in its lines. The stiffness of the roof line is mitigated by the disposal of the chimneys and the dormers, though the latter, looked at without reference to this purpose, might be regarded as somewhat incongruous.

The interior is reached by passing through a handsome vestibule and up a few easy steps, which bring one into a stately square hall occupying a very large space in the centre of the building. The style of the interior is a clever adaptation of the Italian renaissance—that is to say, all the lines are straight instead of being curved, and the scheme of color is extremely light, the main element in the ornamentation being profuse and graceful wood-carving in low relief—panels, friezes, pilasters, chimney-pieces, balustrades, mouldings, and every appropriate part of the interior being exquisitely fashioned into the most delicate and refined designs of vine, flower, leaf and bough, cherubs, and all conceivable decorative forms suitable to a home. The large hall above mentioned is a palatial and lofty room, which is to be decorated in ivory white and pale yellow. It has a square-beamed ceiling, and on three sides generous doors lead to the various apartments on the same floor—the library, or drawing-room, the morning-room, the dining-room, breakfast-room, etc. A great staircase rises from the west side, and conducts to the second story by three easy stages, broken by spacious landings. The first landing is reached from two sides, north and south, the bottom of each flight having square, carved newel posts. Each of the square balusters is to be carved in a distinct design. At the two outer corners of the first landing are to be flat panels carved on the sides. At the top of the next portion of the stairway a broad landing makes to the right and north, extending along and overlooking the west side of the hall, under an immense window of British antique glass. This glass is semi-transparent, and will be arranged in a Dutch renaissance design of gold color, which will be quite complicated and elaborate at the top and in almost plain flat tints below. A third and final easy stage in the staircase attains to the second floor. A fine feature of the great hall here referred to will be a large, oblong alcove at the southeast corner, containing a huge open fireplace, with white marble facing, flanked on either hand by a stained glass window made by Tiffany. Seats will run around the sides of the alcove, which has a wide, carved frieze of beautiful workmanship, and the sides of which are divided by several carved pilasters into panels to be filled by brownish-yellow silk, bordered by a beaded architrave.

From the hall one steps into a large and sunny library in the southwest corner of the house. The two bays, of semi-circular shape, give on either street, and on the north side of the room is a splendid carved mantelpiece of almost monumental proportions, surrounding and surmounting a fireplace with marble facing and hearth. Rows of low bookshelves, carved in admirable taste, in low relief, line the walls wherever the space and light permit. It may be stated in parenthesis that all the carved woodwork, unless specified otherwise, is in pine, which is employed lavishly throughout the house, and is to be painted either pure white or ivory color or a pale neutral tint to harmonize with an occasional note of dull yellow or pale green. The carvings are done by Mr. Emmel in a thoroughly artistic spirit, with sufficient

freedom to prevent their freshness from being masked by the paint; and in order to give those readers who have never visited a Florentine palace of the fifteenth or sixteenth century some idea of the character of these delightful decorations, it may be as well to refer them to the mantelpieces, cornices and other carved woodwork of the oldest colonial residences in Boston and Salem, whose quaint dignity and unobtrusive beauty of contour every one should be glad to see revived in our time.

Adjoining the library on the east is the cheerful morning room, a smaller but equally attractive apartment, having a south exposure. The walls are to be grayish-green, and the dado, in smallish panels, will be diversified by a carved panel set at intervals among the others, the relief part tinted in pale green, the ground in white. The open fireplace here has a hearth and facing of Georgia pink marble, with an elaborately carved mantelpiece, framing a bevelled mirror with shelves.

On the opposite, the northern side of the hall, is the dining-room, in which the general scheme of decoration applied to the rest of the house is departed from, because the room is not to be used by daylight. The ceiling is divided into nine deep panels by heavy beams; the north and south walls are semi-circular; two buffets are built into the southern corners. The room is finished in mahogany, and hung with Tynecastle tapestry, which is a stamped canvas hanging, having a vase pattern in quiet green on a copper-color ground. The mahogany dado, which is in large panels of a geometrical outline, and the mahogany mantelpiece are to be inlaid with lighter-colored pieces of the same wood and with Spanish cedar. A masked door gives ingress to the servants. The adjoining breakfast room, on the Gloucester street frontage, is an octagonal apartment, with plenty of daylight and a daintily carved mantelpiece corresponding to the general scope of the ornamentation.

The second floor is devoted to chambers, dressing-rooms, bathrooms, and contains also a boudoir. The boudoir is above the library in the southwest corner of the house. It has an alcove with a round arch, containing a fireplace, faced with white marble, and a carved mantelpiece, thoroughly charming in its grace and spirit. There are seats on each side of the alcove, and alongside of the chimney breasts closets, cupboards and bookshelves, set into the walls just as they do in the colonial mansions of our great grandfathers.

The round turret with its conical roof, which was seen from the outside, contains a spiral private staircase which leads from Gloucester street to the large landing underneath the great window described heretofore. It is hardly necessary to say that such a house is provided with all the modern conveniences known to builders and architects, including an elevator and wires for incandescent lights.