

FOREGROUND AND VISTA AT THE FAIR.

By *W. Hamilton Gibson.*

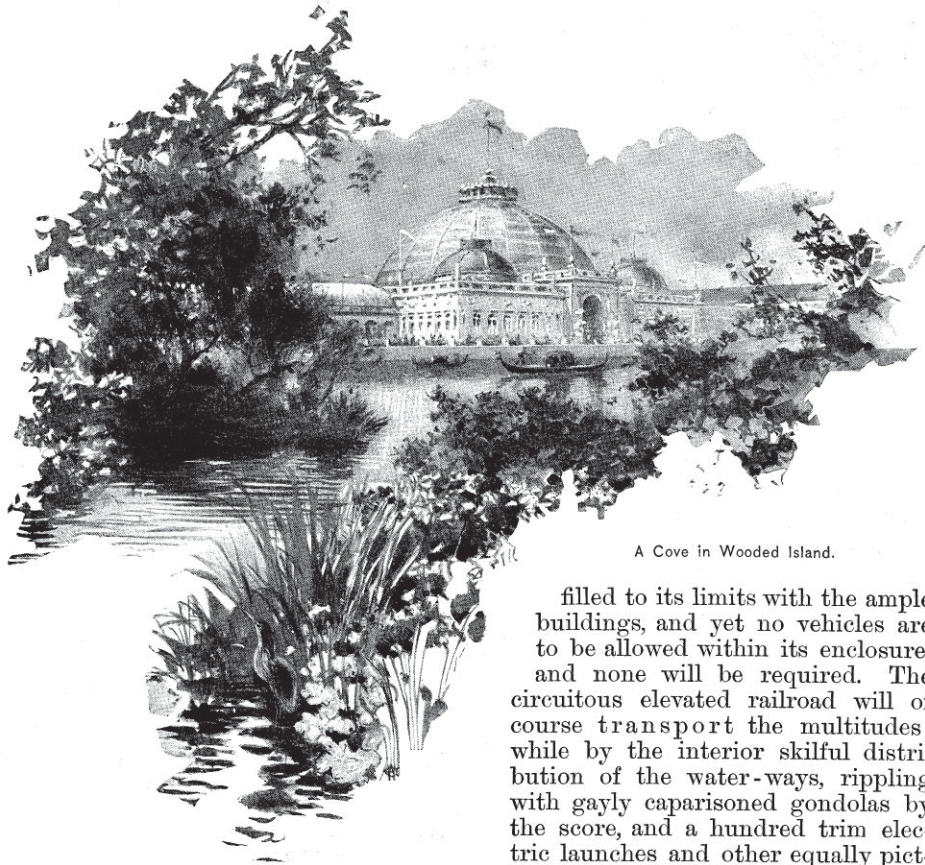
ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR.

BY the time this brief sketch shall have appeared in print the world's greatest international fair will have thrown open its gates to the impatient multitudes, and millions will have looked with rapture upon its impressive perspectives of palaces and enjoyed their treasures. Even to the great general public who are as yet awaiting with eager anticipation the indispensable outing at the Fair, its surpassing architectural features are already enticingly familiar. The "White City" is already a heritage of delight and inspiration to a vast multitude who have spent their available days beneath the spell of its enchantment.

It is no small thing thus to have penetrated the veil, as it were, as is here actually done for many—to have materialized a vision—to have embodied a paradise. The "Heavenly City," the "New Jerusalem," with gates of gold and pearl, which in one questionable shape or another hovers in the hopeful, faithful fancy of so many of the sons of Adam will here find a realization, supplanting or exalting the ideal which has hitherto not always been to the glory of Heaven.

But in thus paying tribute to the architect we are perhaps unconsciously crediting him with more than his due; certainly more than he would himself claim. Of what avail were beautiful palaces if they could not be seen; and how easily might such an assemblage of heroic structures such as these at Jackson Park, as in previous similar expositions, have been so disposed, with relation to each other and their environment, as to have completely lost not only their individual impressiveness but the infinite advantage of their imposing *ensemble*.

We traverse the winding lagoon for an hour in continual delight, every passing moment, every quiet turn of our launch or gondola beneath arching bridge or jutting revetement opening up in either direction new and ravishing vistas of architectural beauty. Yet how little have we considered that the very means of our enjoyment, the pure blue water-way upon which our gondola so listlessly floats, is the crowning artifice by which the work of the architect is glorified—a very triumph and inspiration in the great scheme of landscape—say rather water-scape—gardening, which has made this Columbian Fair a unique model for all others of its kind. I think it is conceded by the architects of the Fair that in no way are its buildings to be seen to such satisfaction or full effect as from the lagoon. And it is well to remember, if only as an instructive object-



A Cove in Wooded Island.

lesson, as we glide upon this liquid street, how much of our present enjoyment is due to the forethought of a supreme design, which, even before a single foundation-wall was laid, had taken into account the most effective grouping of the architectural features.

More than this, too, how many of these fortunate architects must have realized the rare satisfaction of having builded better than they knew, when for the first time they viewed their works from the vantage point afforded by their collaborator, the landscape artist, and saw these superb creations given back to them in twofold beauty from the clear mirror of the lagoon. The unique character and important innovation of this lagoon feature may be inferred when we consider that we have here an Exposition covering over five hundred and fifty acres, comfortably

filled to its limits with the ample buildings, and yet no vehicles are to be allowed within its enclosure, and none will be required. The circuitous elevated railroad will of course transport the multitudes; while by the interior skilful distribution of the water-ways, rippling with gayly caparisoned gondolas by the score, and a hundred trim electric launches and other equally picturesque craft, every portion of the grounds will be easily accessible. The entire circuit on this water-course, from any given point, will occupy nearly an hour. The luxurious tourist arriving at his destination is invited at the water's edge by ascending terraces of marble steps, their balustrades on either side overtopped by picturesque masses of tropic and other luxuriant vegetation. Huge bronze-like agaves surmount the lofty marble urns; cannas, musas, caladiums, in most effective and artistic groups, are dispersed among broad expanses of velvety sward, begemmed with parterres of brilliant bloom.

But it is not alone in these picturesque settings of lawn and garden which everywhere abound throughout the grounds that we find our fullest appreciation of the landscape art. In the spell of these imposing structures, towering above the revetement walls on

each side as we traverse the lagoon, we had utterly ignored another feature of its banks, or perhaps had our attention only momentarily inveigled thither by the invitation of the bevy of snowy ducks or geese or graceful swans hastening from our prow, and gliding beneath the overhanging boughs of feathery gray willows. Here indeed is a haven for a tired soul, a fairy realm whose modest charms are apt to be overlooked in the claims of the overwhelming architectural surroundings. But sooner or later its restful refuge will be discovered and welcomed. How many a foot-sore mortal, weary from the very excess of enthusiasm, will seek this quiet retirement, content for the moment to consign the architect to the accessory place of vista and horizon, while he roams and pries and muses among the labyrinthian paths, fragrant bowers, and shadowy glades, and along the reedy flowery borders of this sylvan fairy island, which the artistic genius of Olmsted and Codman has here, in two short years, conjured up like magic from the muddy, dreary marsh.

Connected to the main-land by a

half-dozen spans of so-called bridges, it is readily accessible from any approach. It is a realm of strange inconsistencies and surprises, harmonies and pleasant discords, unified with the rarest skill. The familiar park or garden at one moment, its curving walks encircling more or less—generally less—conventional parterre, diversified with closely bedded mosaic of bright blossoms; and now a path leading us between high walls of blossom-laden shrubbery, skirting a rustic arbor, or winding beneath the shade of tall, dense branches of trees, which, however at home they may appear, so wonderfully has the skill of the landscapist concealed his artifice, are still almost as much strangers to the soil as ourselves; the adjustment and grouping giving the complete illusion of nature's random planting.

Only a very few of the thousands of trees upon this "wooded island"—medium-sized white-oaks—are native tenants of the place. Only two years ago isolated in the more elevated dunes of a great morass, they now find themselves in strange company; the



The Californian Building.



The Border of the Lagoon.

soil from the bed of the lagoon, having levelled the former slopes about their feet, is now peopled with individuals as large as themselves. Many a rare nook upon the island's borders would defy the critical scrutiny of the botanist or artist to detect a single tell-tale evidence of artifice. Would you step from the conventional park to the wild garden in ten paces? Follow me through this winding path, embowered with its

snowy banks of spiraea. Pry your way here beneath the branches. A few more steps, and the ripples gleam through the branches before us, and we emerge at the water's edge beneath a tangle of willows, while a brood of white ducks, disturbed at our approach, glide out upon the mill-pond—for such indeed is the irresistible association from the surroundings. This hap-hazard chaos of willows and alders disarms all suspicion of artificial planting. We already anticipate the scene at the brink, and as we press our way among the yielding oziers, find ourselves listening for the familiar “c-r-o-n-k” among the spatter-docks.

In a moment more we confront a tiny cove bordered with sedges and tall bulrushes, and intermingled gray-green willows and alders, while the water beneath is hidden by dense clumps of lush pickerel-weed, luxuriant in their feathery spikes of azure bloom. A tiny sportive frog leaps from the border mud, and a dragon-fly darts past on shimmering wing.

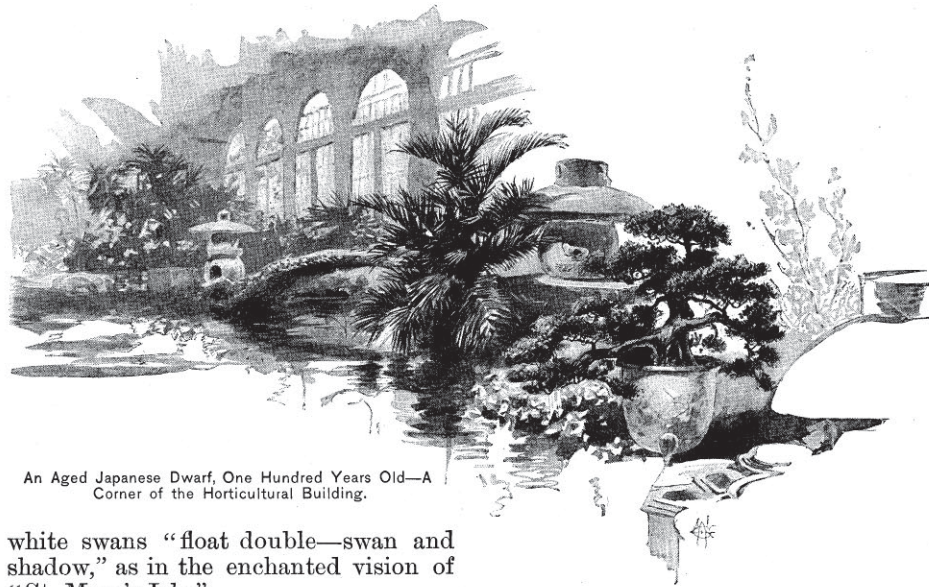
It is only as we contemplate the vista across the water that we realize the beautiful deception as yonder beetling dome, in its gilded splendor, or sunlit palaces everywhere gleaming through the waters are brought to our feet in ripples from gliding gondola, swan, or duck.

Was ever border-tangle brushed by mill-pond raft or fishing-punt more wild or spontaneous than this! Foreground and vista in endless combination and surprise greet us as we follow

our course about the shore, with Flora's own wild calendar from neck to neck. Here a secluded harbor, bristling with arrowheads and white with its spires of bloom, its sedgy banks aflame with cardinal flowers, whose scarlet reflections mingle with the snowy glints from the sunlit façade or spangling flashes from the crystal dome across the water. Here we invade the sheltered retreat of a bittern or small heron, which stalks away with ruffled temper at our intrusion. Creeping between the neighboring bank of alders, we emerge upon a sequestered nook shut off from the main lagoon by a small, straggling islet, plummy with willows and sedges, the main banks fringed with rushes and burr-marigolds and tall galingales that wave their graceful heads above a wild garden of blossoming blue flag. In and out among its willows beyond, the ever present fleet of ducks glides among the dancing ripples, or snow-

liquid replica. Attar of roses! One such inviting whiff is sufficient. Leaving the water's edge we return toward the interior of the island, and are soon confronted by the wonderful rose-garden wherein are assembled all the roses of the world, with their thousands of varieties. Roses single and double, pink roses, white roses, roses yellow, crimson, orange, and saffron, and, indeed, of every hue but blue, mingling their beauty and their fragrance in an acre of bloom, and sprinkling the ground in showers of petals with every breeze.

The now famous rose-garden lies in the southern end of the island, approached through winding walks, garlanded with flowery shrubs of every habit and hue, of graceful blossom-burdened spiræas, drooping as with a weight of snow, or varied with rare foliaged plants which vie with the flowers in the endless play of their brilliant colors. Through the skilful



An Aged Japanese Dwarf, One Hundred Years Old—A Corner of the Horticultural Building.

white swans "float double—swan and shadow," as in the enchanted vision of "St. Mary's Isle."

As we leave this beguiling haunt the air is suddenly bewitched with entrancing perfume, and our fancy lit with luminous visions of the Orient from the great golden doorway which glows through the branches from the opposite brink and floods the water with its

foresight and planning of Mr. John Thorpe, the custodian of this realm dedicated to Flora, the fair goddess will crown him with a new decoration of wreath or laurel for every week, from the earliest yellow glow of May to the brilliant maples and

the final autumnal glory of the chrysanthemum.

Japonica! Japonica! How continually does the spirit of the flowery land hover here! It is, indeed, scarcely a surprise that the actual, familiar outlines of its quaint massive gables suddenly confronts us, looking down above a mass of the Mikado's own chrysanthemum, and we suddenly find ourselves transported to Tokio or Yokohama, surrounded by a veritable epitome of Japan, embracing all the actual features, floral, ornamental, and utilitarian, with which, through the educational influence of painted fan and screen and household gods of vase and kakemono, we have become so pleasantly familiar.

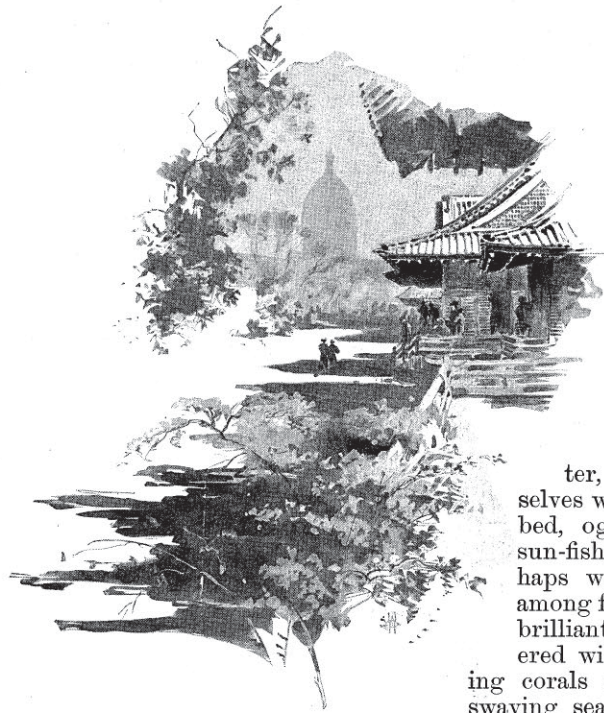
The long, low-roofed, wooden temple is surrounded from its foundation by a

ture parks, which, for the moment, make the beholder seem to be upon a mighty cliff or in flight with the soaring falcon, else how could he thus gaze down upon the summit of such a huge, lofty pine as this which he now sees beneath him! A fine example of one of these arboreal paradoxes is to be seen in the Japanese exhibit in the Horticultural Building—an aged dwarf of an *arbor vite* (*Thuja*) like a gigantic cedar of Lebanon, which, while having all the inherent characteristics of an actual age and dignity of over one hundred years, is still, with the big vase which it occupies, barely the height of one's shoulders.

In no structure within the grounds is the outward expression so sympathetically reflective of its architectural purpose as in the Fisheries

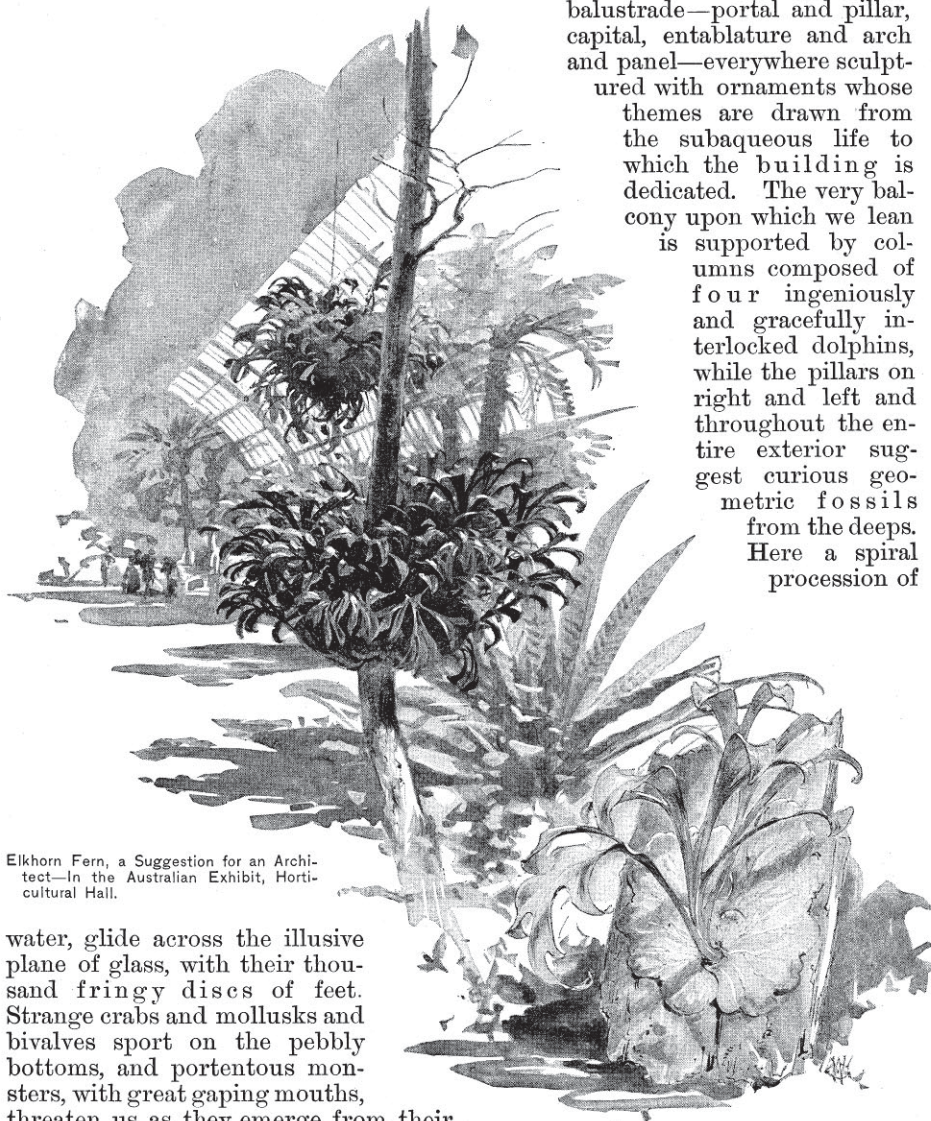
Building. Itself reflected in the blue lagoon, in its architectural functions and sculptural ornament, it in turn reflects the lacustrine life of the waters, which not only almost lave its foundation walls but actually pour into its interior in fountain and cascade and gigantic aquaria. As we follow around these green translucent walls within, our passage lit only from the diffused light transmitted from above the water,

we can almost fancy ourselves walking on the actual riverbed, ogled by familiar forms of sun-fish, perch, or pickerel; or perhaps wandering as in a dream among fair ocean caves abloom with brilliant sea-anemones, and embowered with mimic groves of branching corals and all manner of softly swaying sea-weed—graceful crimson laminaria reaching to the surface of the water, responding in serpentine grace to the soft invasion of waving fin. Rare living gems of fishes, very butterflies of the deep, float past flashing in iridescence with every subtle turn of their painted bodies. Star-fish, at first apparently stationary, as though in mid-



Japanese Building on Wooded Island.

characteristic terraced garden, embracing many examples of those "precious goods done up in small parcels," which have always been the particular fad of the Japanese horticulturist—tiny giants of trees, so to speak, arranged in minia-



Elkhorn Fern, a Suggestion for an Architect—In the Australian Exhibit, Horticultural Hall.

balustrade—portal and pillar, capital, entablature and arch and panel—everywhere sculptured with ornaments whose themes are drawn from the subaqueous life to which the building is dedicated. The very balcony upon which we lean is supported by columns composed of four ingeniously and gracefully interlocked dolphins, while the pillars on right and left and throughout the entire exterior suggest curious geometric fossils from the deeps. Here a spiral procession of

water, glide across the illusive plane of glass, with their thousand fringy discs of feet. Strange crabs and mollusks and bivalves sport on the pebbly bottoms, and portentous monsters, with great gaping mouths, threaten us as they emerge from their nebulous obscurity and steal to within a few inches of our faces.

All of its interior ichthyological features might have been anticipated even at the threshold of the building, with its rich and effective portals, where so many of these very forms are seen petrified in surface ornament. The building is in the form of a rectangular central structure with two octagonal annexes, each with its own beautiful portal, and connected to the main edifice by curved colonnades, with arch and

huge toads, whose uncouth shapes thus embodied in conventional ornament are singularly agreeable and effective. Each successive pillar is a study alike for the naturalist or designer—here a sinuous procession of river-horses (hippocampus), the incurved tail forming a volute repeated with pleasant effect in the spiral bands of ornament. Accommodating star-fishes embrace their respective pillars, touching points in geometric

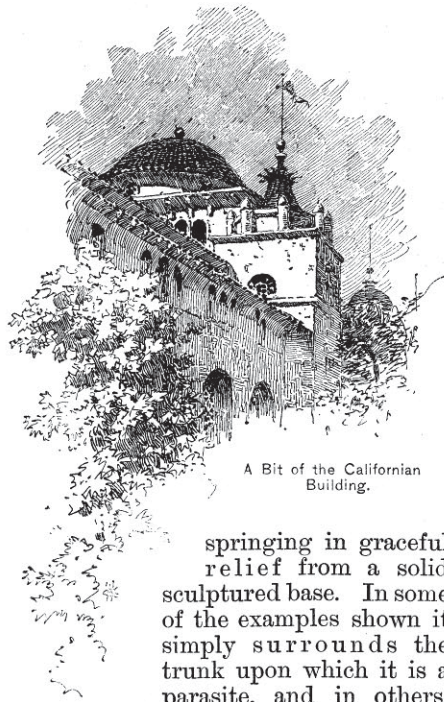


The Edge of the Rose Garden, Wooded Island.

design. Here are eels and fishes meandering among bulrushes and arrowheads. Lizards, crabs, and turtles, each combine in effective ornament about their particular columns, which are surmounted by capitals of even greater ingenuity and effectiveness of design, perhaps because less geometric. Gaping frogs leaping among water-weeds; lobsters captive and sprawling in their wicker "pots;" fishes entangled in the meshes of nets, or engaged in mortal combat, their gaping mouths finely utilized in effective points of shadow—the modelling of each and all suggests the perfection of a cast from nature. To those who look for a happy blending of architectural purpose and harmonious ornament, this building will be a welcome innovation. To the naturalist or the idler in quest of the mere picturesque, the Fisheries Building with its wandering façade and colonnade, its roof of ruddy tiles and almost Mooresque richness of surface ornament in high relief, will be found well worth careful study.

How many are the obvious natural themes yet awaiting their sculptured memorial in the temple of architecture. Must the classical and testy acanthus forever guard that exalted basket unchallenged, and the antique, indeed almost palæontologic lotus forever keep us oblivious to the abounding wealth of natural suggestion of even surpassing opportunity? What a rare suggestion for a national architectural theme, for instance, has nature thus far wasted on the wilderness in that elk-horn fern of Australia, which forms one of the most conspicuous features of the arboreal exhibit of that land of tropic contradictions and zoölogical anomalies. Where can there be found another such ready-made and graceful model for a massive capital?

Had this remarkable plant chanced to have been a native of ancient Egypt or Rome or Greece, it is difficult to conceive of its having escaped being immortalized in stone. Will the future national architecture of Australia ever embody its opportunities? Here is a veritable capital of clustered fern-forms,



A Bit of the Californian Building.

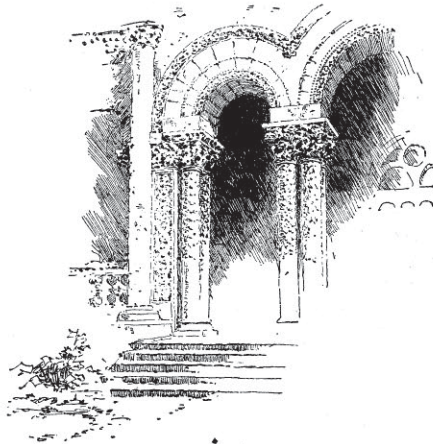
springing in graceful relief from a solid sculptured base. In some of the examples shown it simply surrounds the trunk upon which it is a parasite, and in others, the architectural suggestion is heightened by the cluster appearing at the summit of its pillar, the dead continuation of the trunk above having fallen.

Superlative anticipation of our hopes is often disastrous to their full realization. But no such danger awaits the visitor to the Columbian fair. The most extreme glorification of this superb achievement at Chicago still leaves us the superlative of actual experience.

Dull indeed must be the intelligence

which fails to respond to the vision of beauty which the genius of architecture has here created. Whatever oblivion may await the other features of the Exposition, the fame of the architect is secure. Even though in their substance his creations here are but as the flowers of a day, to be cut down ere the coming of winter, their very evanescence constitutes their most abiding charm.

Though we may spend weeks in the enjoyment of the unexampled treasures within these walls, confusion will at length claim most of our minor reminiscences and the winnowing process of the years will at last leave few tokens. But the glamour of this celestial city, this throng of ethereal palaces hovering between sky and sky, buoyant as uplifting archangel wings from dome and pinnacle and acroteria—these will abide to the end of our days.



Portal of the Fisheries Building.