

THE TABLE AS AN OBJECT OF ART.

By DR. STOCKBAUER.

IN the department of furniture there is no one article which stands in such intimate relation to civilized life as the table. Sofas, chairs and cupboards, beds and chests have a more exclusive and self-dependent importance; the table, on the contrary, is in its general form the central point of the family and social life. The table more than any other article of furniture shows the varying spirit of the times and the characteristics of the tendencies of art which prevailed in those several times.

If, in tracing the development of this piece of furniture, we separate the supports from the slab, we must necessarily begin with the tables of the Romans. Writings and paintings speak of and exhibit a multitude of tables which were in use among the Romans; there were the little round tables with one leg, the foot of which was of ivory; the little three legged tables of bronze; the four legged tables with straight pillar-like legs often fluted (No. 1), with claws for the feet; small ornamental dining tables placed one by one before each guest; sideboards for the display of costly vessels and plate, hence called *mense vasariæ*; money changers' tables, and those destined for divine service; all these, however, must

belong to the use of the Sphinx and other figures which were appropriated to the more richly appointed tables, and may be called free imitations of similar Roman marble shapes with the natural modifications which distinguish wood from stone (5). Of the same kind as the above named Gothic supports are designs, like No. 6, in which the decoration is necessarily conceived and disposed in a new spirit. The central part, which, at an earlier period was more or less pierced, is here supplied with niches and flanked right and left by pilasters. This architectonic motive then finds its most beautiful and natural expression in the baluster and pillar-like foot, shown in 7 and 8.

In the period called Louis XIV., the inflated magnificence was no longer content with the simple and natural shapes of the past, but trimmed them up with glaring additions to produce effect, so that the legs of tables were rarely to be seen without some extraneous heavy ornaments of gilt bronze, which at first were, correctly enough, applied only to the connecting and finishing pieces, but at a later period were met with in every part (9). By means of such decorations, and strengthening by metal settings, the circumference of the wooden supports could be diminished, and thus, instead of the bulky legs of the sideboards, appeared a host of slender ones, with a slight resem-

study of the significance of color, etc., this was so much the less attended to, as for fifty years past such questions had no longer been canvassed. And color was just the sore point in those sickly times. Everything was colorless; all was white and gray, and the stucco mania of the foregoing period had covered everything, which used to be executed in a different material and decorated with color, with stucco imitation of marble. So even the feet of the tables had a coating of marble, and as they were most frequently executed after Roman or pseudo-Roman bronze models, their meagreness and meanness contrasted all the more with this imitation of marble (12). If in earlier times wood was treated like bronze and metal, it was at least covered and gilded; now it was equally treated like metal, but given the appearance of marble, so that material, color and form might be said to lie to one another.—*The Workshop.*

NEW DISCOVERIES AT POMPEII.

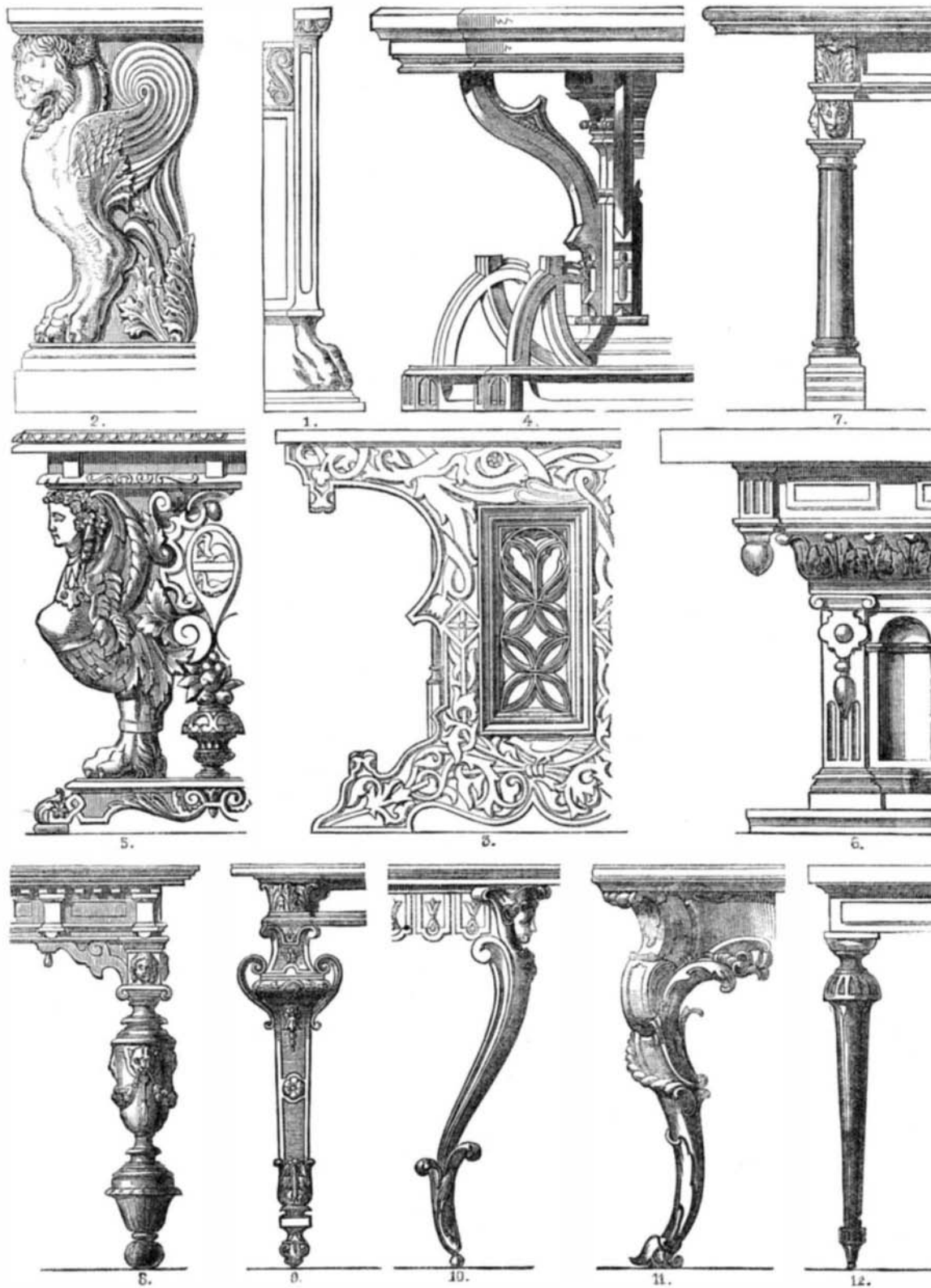
THOSE who have excavated to deeper levels in other parts of the classic earth have carried on their work, up to the actual moment, with great success, if little ostentation, and day by day it has shown that we have still to learn more of the buried city of Pompeii than has been learned hitherto. It is found that the ashes of the mighty eruption extended farther, and that their heaps rose higher, than when the diggers of a generation or more ago came upon those narrow streets, with lofty pavements, and low sunk gutters, and stepping stones to assist the foot passenger in crossing them when heavy rains descended; that architecture described by Vitruvius, those beautiful houses, composed of atrium, peristyle, painted banqueting rooms and bed chambers, fountain courts, polished pavements, inscribed walls, and painted surfaces, telling us nearly all we know of ancient graphic art.

It would be superfluous to analyze the index to these recent disinterments of ancient art; but some points in connection with them are of more than antiquarian interest. Thus, the whole of the mythological legends belong, without an exception, to Greece. The colors of the female clothing are usually of bronze green or saffron, red or rose, the last sometimes tinged with yellow, with, in rare instances, a mass of purple, scarcely dimmed by the lapse of centuries. Again, we perceive an almost invariable repetition of those ivory tinted skins, brown and curly locks, and mimeries of sculpture which are reputed to have been at a certain period fashionable with the Athenians. M. Houssaye, in his latest exposition upon this topic, is glad to have found that the most recent discoveries have amply confirmed his impressions of two years ago. He notes, however, a remarkable coincidence. There has been a picture exhumed at Pompeii, representing the Three Graces, which Raphael, of course, could not possibly have seen, though he might, in the course of his studies, have fallen upon some imperfect reproduction of it. Yet the two compositions, while of different dimensions, are precisely the same—in grouping, in form, in expression, and even in charm. Now, not even a sketch of the pure antique was known until long after the middle of the eighteenth century, while the actual picture is a modern revelation altogether. We owe it, indeed, to the critical acumen of those who have been enabled to distinguish between the authentic work of the Greeks and the libertine imitations of the Siennese, though how those latter obtained their designs and models it is difficult to say. These identities may be still further pursued, but the marvellous fact suffices that Raphael, copying a statue, applied the very same process to his painting which had been employed by his predecessors fifteen centuries previously.

Within the last few years forty figures have been redeemed from out these artistic tombs, which were evidently details of an immense composition, intended for the adornment of a theatre or a banqueting hall; but it must be remembered that there were two Pompeiis; the first buried beneath the second, before the second was overwhelmed by the ashes and lava. In the former have been found, far more universally than when M. Houssaye carried on his investigations in 1874, pictures of lightly clad figures floating through the air, relieved against brown, black, or crimson skies, with masses of carnation cloud beneath their feet, and genii hanging, so to speak, around them, enveloped in robes of hyacinth, blue, green, and so on, the colors appearing to be laid thickly, upon partially vitrified surfaces. There has not been opportunity, as yet, for the complete analysis of whatever these pigments may consist of; but, in one example, we are informed, the gloss and tint of golden hair, with the true auburn tinge glancing through it, is illustrated to absolute perfection. Still there is a general resemblance between the paintings brought to light in the eighteenth and those unveiled in the latter half of the nineteenth century—only that the further we penetrate the more characteristic do the demonstrations become, whether in fresco, distemper, or encaustic, though it is confidently asserted that from age to age the same processes have with more or less skill been employed. The Neapolitan chemists, in fact, have not scrupled from time to time to seize upon these fragments of painted beauty, and analyze them for the sake of arriving at the secrets of their forefathers. This, indeed, is known to have been done, and is done now, with reference to painting on panels of wood and slabs of ivory, and even with layers of color rasped from the surfaces of pure white marbles, such as were lavishly employed—almost always to be artificially variegated, however—by the fanciful and fastidious decorators of Pompeii. Upon the whole, as this antique city is thrown more and more open to modern light, it proves to be the richest memorial extant of the Grecian genius as represented by an art so different from, and still at the same time so kindred to, sculpture. In most other classic centres, while the form and the purity have survived, the color and the splendor have faded; but here as chamber after chamber, gallery after gallery, is opened, a new beauty of the past appears, freshly vivified by the long excluded light, and, as we are assured, labyrinths of interest remain yet to be explored. The latest formal report was dated 1874—the last belongs to the autumn of 1876.—*Building News.*

AZTEC RUINS IN ARIZONA.

A TRAVELLER, writing from the White Mountain Agency, Arizona, describes some ancient ruins less than two miles from the military post up the east branch from the White River. The main buildings are of sandstone, the ledges of which are found in the bluffs about a mile distant. The outlying buildings were no doubt constructed of wood or adobe on stone foundations; but the debris of the main building, which covers about two acres of ground to an average height of about six feet, would indicate that they were entirely of stone. The form of the building was nearly square, and set due north and south. Some of the outlying buildings were circular.



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yield to the marble tables found in Pompeii, which, in point of artistic execution, are of universal and prominent importance. As the Italian Greeks are always distinguished by their acquaintance with nature, the feet (No. 2), are shaped like lions' legs and claws, supporting in a lying posture the slab above; the head, which is placed over the thigh, finishes the support, but does not directly come in contact with the slab, because, as in nature, so in art, the head is not used as a supporting but a crowning and supported member. This table is indeed an unsurpassable example of the style in which natural animal motives may be artistically treated. The disproportionate predominance of decorative features over the constructional forms which characterized the later Gothic period is particularly found in the supports of the one footed tables, which were not only surcharged with an exuberance of such details, but disfigured by them in an illegitimate and irrational manner (4).

In the configuration of the Renaissance furniture, the best known artists were Ducerceau, and his contemporary Brede man. To them we are indebted for a number of most beautiful and graceful examples which served for models for the furniture makers of their time. In their designs we perceive three kinds of treatment, two of which are derived from the antique and the preceding Gothic period, but the third is an entirely original and independent creation. To the antique

blance to antique models, which (as in No. 10) perform their supporting function in graceful lines. But in the time immediately subsequent, during the reign of Louis XV., these forms were distorted into most irrational shapes. The feet of the tables with all their Rococo decorations despise every trace of organic articulation and development, being composed, like stucco ornaments and porcelain, of twisted and spiral pieces entirely destitute of any logical foundation and absolutely contradictory to the qualities of wood and supporters (11). Still this indissoluble discord between the material, the purpose and the form, was somewhat mitigated by gilding the whole and giving to the wood the appearance of metal.

The sober time of Louis XVI. put an end indeed to these extravagancies, but went itself into another and still worse extreme. The antique discoveries of that period, as they were in agreement with the efforts after natural simplicity, were worked up in preference to all else for the wants of the moment; but the time had become so unartistic, so sickly and so unproductive of anything original, that even the antique forms which might have been directly employed, were crippled and spoilt, not to mention the new specimens which were derived from such examples. All that was thought of was outward form; as to a deeper search into the legitimate effect and connection between material and technic, or any