Thesis

A Chapter House for a Greek Letter Fraternity.

C. V. Merrick
Course IV.
1900.
C. F. Merrick '00

A Chapter House for a Greek Letter Fraternity.

The wealthy alumni of a certain college fraternity have subscribed a large sum of money to be expended in the erection of a chapter house. This house will be located in the college town and in it will reside about twenty-four undergraduate members of the fraternity.

The alumni being conversant both with architecture and the undergraduate life at the college, have stipulated the following conditions. The first requisite shall be large and well lighted.
rooms for the purpose of study.
Closely connected with each study shall be a bathroom and bed room. These rooms shall all be placed on the second floor.

On the first floor should be a large reception hall, library, billiard room, parlor, and music room.

In the basement space shall be provided for laundry, kitchen, pantry, servants' quarters, etc.

Placed in the most secluded portion of the building and entered by a secret passage shall be the chapter or lodge room. A safe vault for the preservation of chapter records shall also be considered a part of the chapter room.

The style of the building is left to the discretion of the architect.
The Architect's Solution.

To more fully grasp the problem let us consider the difficulties with which the Architect had to contend.

Since the Greek-letter Fraternity is more or less classic in its origin the Architect must endeavor to embody in his design the principles of classic art, architecture and solidity. At first glance one might suppose that by studying the temples of ancient Greece and Rome, the inspiration resulting from such a study would lead to an easy solution. Here arises the first difficulty. The ancient temples were not homes. The Fraternity Chapter House must be a home. The ancient temple were the abiding places of gods and goddesses, who had no
no physical wants. The Chapter House lies to be the dwelling place of strong, healthy, active men.

The problem therefore resolves itself into an attempt on the part of the designer, to combine in pleasing proportions, the solidity and impressiveness of Classic architecture with our ideals of the home, a place well lighted, homelike, tenantable in all seasons and possessing an interior as well as an exterior charm. The logical conclusion therefore is that the plan must let the expression of the homelike quality whilst the elevation may take on more of the impressiveness of the Classical style.

The first necessity of any home should be abundant light. Couple with this the college students
Demand for plenty of room and you
have the beginning the germ of your
design. A central court extending
from the first floor to the roof
and covered by a skylight
is taken as the most salient feature
of the plan. About this are
grounded the various rooms and
since the expression of the home
quality is of first importance
let us consider the play yard
the manner in which the archi-
itect has grouped the rooms around
the court.

Upon entering the building from
the western side, through the broad
doorway the first striking
entrance impression is one of light
and cheeriness. Through a large
opening directly in line with
entrance you gain a pleasing
view of the broad court. The student
whom you are visiting and who is to show you about the house is seen descending the broad staircase on the right. He greets you in the reception hall, the large room which precede the court and in which you have waited since you sent up your card. Your guide motions you towards the left and you enter the music room, with its broad windows overlooking the Campus and its air of restful seclusion. Leaving the music room and passing through the reception hall, again, you start towards the rear of the house. Upon entering the central court, the eye instinctively looks upwards to take note of the balcony which completely encircles the court, and off from which open the studios on the second floor. The student points out to you the advantages of such an assen-
ment. He points to the windows which afford a great amount of light for the study and bedrooms and tells of the windows placed on the outside of the building as well. The skylight over the court is a point of interest, having emblazoned upon it in stained glass the escutcheon and open motto of the fraternity. To the right is the library. A large room facing the south and having ample book room as well as niches for busts and statuettes. A side porch opens from this room and gives a quiet secluded place for lounging during the warm spring evenings. On the left of the court is the billiard room and opening from it, that place dear to every college man, The Den. A door by the conscience by its central location leads to
a counter part of the side porch off from the library and placing the entrance from the side street.
At the other end of the court we enter what seems to be a passage way flanked on either side by columns and terminating in a small conservatory. Upon examination the partitions between the columns are seen to be of the portable variety. When removed the parlor on the right, the passage way itself and the dining room on the left are all thrown into one, large assembly hall. This arrangement was made necessary by the constant need of a large and roomy suitable for dances, recitatives, banquets etc.
The small conservatory forms an interesting feature on the eastern side of the room and is also intended for the use of the musicians needed at the various entertainments.
During your visit to the studies and bathrooms on the second floor you are told that the kitchen, servants' quarters, laundry etc are in the basement. Then it occurs to you that you have not been informed as to the location of the chapter room. The student seems loth to talk on the subject and after much urging disclose the fact that the architect divulged his secret only to the members of the fraternity. His little air of mystery makes you realize that this is a Fraternity chapter house. Although it was designed as a home still like all homes there is probably one closet that contains a skeleton.

Let us step outside and for a few moments examine the exterior with more care than we did upon
Entering. Four massive Corinthian columns mark the entrance, emphasizing and expressing upon the exterior the central interior motive. These great columns also give a dignity and impressive charm to the facade.

The second story windows are plain and small enough to give contrast to the three large, more highly decorative central motives of the first floor. The windows on the first floor to the right and left of the central motive are strong, subdued, and carefully studied, eminently classic in their simplicity and restraint and proportions.

The smaller side porches, from which you may enter the library or billiard room are in a more severe style than the larger western portico and entrance.

The plain feeling of the smaller Doric columns and pilasters and
CORNICE, contrasting strongly with the rich and more brilliant Corinthian columns, pediments and cornices of the main building.

As you turn to go away after a visit to the buildings, the architect hopes that you will more fully appreciate his attempts at architectural expression and emphasis and that you will applaud his effort to cause the carefully studied art and architecture of the Classic past in making this building from more impressive, more homelike and more beautiful.