

## CHAPTER TWENTY: OTHER WRITINGS ON ARCHITECTURE

After the publication of the *Treatise* in 1850 there must have been every reason to foster great expectations for Garbett's future. He was 26 years old, had brought a widely respected and controversial publication into the world and was given every opportunity to excel. He had been hailed by Ralph Waldo Emerson and because of him by many other Americans; in England, Ruskin, the juggernaut of aesthetic-debate, considered him to be an enemy of some stature which is perhaps the greatest compliment anyone could have paid Garbett. What went wrong?

### **Polemics in *The Builder***

Part of the problem must be due to an intrinsic perversity in the manner of historical selection. After all, many people did read the book, even if only few had to acknowledge its influence. In other words his contribution to architecture is certainly larger than his historical neglect would

seem to suggest. Not only that but he used every opportunity to broadcast and defend his ideas, often contributing lengthy and fulminative articles to *The Builder*.<sup>1</sup>

He was, for instance, quick to join a discussion about copyism versus originality which was raging between Kerr, Pugin, Fergusson and Scott.<sup>2</sup> It has to be said that despite his efforts to provoke, he was

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1. A list of his contributions to magazines can be found in the chronologically ordered bibliography of his publications.
  2. For a full account of this discussion see Pevsner (1972) p. 222-237. Garbett's contributions are entitled "A Principle or a Principal.-Which?" *The Builder*, VIII, 379 (May 11, 1850) 219-220 which reacted to a contribution by James Fergusson. And "'Natural Style" in Modern England and America," *The Builder*, VIII, 408 (Nov. 30, 1850) 566-567.

completely cold-shouldered by all sides.<sup>3</sup> A closer look at Garbett's reactions to the articles by Fergusson and Kerr reveals to what extent these two were far more sympathetic to new impulses than Garbett, even though he had done so much to anticipate developments theoretically. Fergusson, for example, approved wholeheartedly of the Crystal Palace. Kerr, like Garbett, had decided that the contemporary predilection for Gothic was no more than a fashion. But Kerr went further by wanting to annihilate this blind reverence for precedent and the authority of the past.<sup>4</sup> Kerr was a *modern* in the

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3. None of the contributions by the other debaters condescended to mention Garbett or refer to his articles.

4. Robert Kerr, "Copyism in Architecture," *The Builder*, VIII, 406 (Nov. 16, 1850) 541-543. The Reply from Garbett was entitled "'Natural Style' in Modern England and America," *The Builder*, VIII, 408 (Nov. 30, 1850) 566-567.

Swiftian sense of the word; he had spent a year in America and confessed to admiring their go-ahead-ism. He had returned *wearing a broad rimmed hat and a full skirted coat*, he now kept his hands in his pockets and had grown as much of a beard as he could muster, Kerr confessed to being full of liberty and ideas about equality.<sup>5</sup> He had confidence in an unknowable future, and, theoretically at least, had the courage to cut the umbilical cord holding the nineteenth-century architecture to its sense of the past.

Garbett could not approve of such sentiments, there was no necessity to reject ancient authority out of hand. The freedom from tradition legendarily enjoyed by the Americans, was for him as much a freedom as an enforced isolation, the two had cancelled each other out leaving nothing. Taste was for him inextricably bound to absolute points of reference and had to depart from a critical approach to tradition and not a sweeping rejection of it.

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5. *Op. Cit.*, 542 1st Column.

During these early years his efforts were of course largely concentrated on defending and propagating the principles he had set down in the *Treatise*, making it his special mission to eradicate deception in architecture exposing the use of *sham construction* where possible, propounding the belief he had inherited from Robison and Bartholomew that the question of style in architecture should be reduced to that of style in construction and trying to convince others of the importance and implications of Samuel Ware's particular definition of Gothic.<sup>6</sup>

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6. Much later, In *The Athenaeum*, 2126 (July 25, 1868) 123, a certain "H.M.W." quotes Garbett on Vaulting being: *the all pervading MOTIVE, the final CAUSE of Gothic Architecture, that to which all its members subserve.* And in a note,- *This was first shown we believe by Ware, in his admirable 'Tract on Vaults.'* Then H.M.W. goes on to say that this was first pointed out by Barry the Painter: *We quote the*

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*following passage from Vol. 1 of his works, p. 130 (1809) This is a letter to Edmund Burke dating 1768 which discusses the problem of intersecting Barrel Vaults. Two issues later comes Garbett's reply impatiently dismissing H.M.W.'s claims to Barry's priority by saying that the mere illusory appearance of pointed ribs at the intersection of two barrel vaults does not constitute a definition of Gothic as a system. The rest of the passage is rather interesting as it shows his position relative to Viollet-le-Duc, while suggesting another origin for Gothic: ..his [H.M.W.'s] notion, still the vulgar one, that the use of pointed arches ever led to Gothic Architecture, or had any tendency thereto, is, I maintain, inconsistent with Ware's and mine, or a I may call it, the now accepted theory, since it is also that of the first living architectural author, M. Viollet-le-Duc, and no other remains in the field. [The publication of Viollet-le-Duc's *Dictionnaire* had been completed*  
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in 1868] "H.M.W." cannot have understood our position, which is, that the exactly right or reasonable working out of vaulted buildings, (but never of unvaulted) did, would, and must anywhere lead to the entire Gothic system, and no other. So that in any world, with or without "works of the ancients," the sole essentials to the rise of complete Gothic are these two, a class of buildings designed to be vaulted and a true architect. from: *The Athenaeum*, 2128 (Aug. 8, 1868) 187. We notice that Garbett's determinism had, rather than diminishing, grown stronger with the years. He continues with his passage which I want to quote in full because of its distillation of social causes of architectural style: ...what led men to build durably and nobly (as the vaultings imply), and what drove designers to become, instead of mere decorators, veritable architects, a sort of men then extinct, as far as we know, since perhaps the Graeco-Persian wars? As I am not

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satisfied with M. Viollet-le-Duc's, the only extant theory as to these deeper causes, I will state my present one. The driving of designers to be architects I now attribute mainly to the preaching of that great man St Bernard of Citeaux, against the fantastic or wild adornments of the Romanesque cloisters and other buildings. The Cistercians, after their reform by him, were the admitted originators of Gothic, though their rules read like those of the early Quakers; and, however, paradoxical this may look, I believe the very spirit that four centuries later substituted the cheap and nasty Friend's meeting-house for the "steeple-house," did with different accompaniments lead the Cistercians (who also at first interdicted steeples, oddly enough) to all the glories of the great Gothic school. Designers were by St. Bernard's principles driven from "Norman cut-work and crinkle-crinkle" and grotesque sculpture, to the perfecting of the building itself, the

In time, what could initially be excused as a fiery spirit, quickly became increasingly offensive. Enthusiasm turned into bitterness. Criticism could no longer transcend sarcasm. The brilliant independence of thought he had exhibited in his book slowly underwent a *volte face*, Garbett's ideas began to congeal into a course more rigidly determined by Ruskin, whose views he began to defend with increasing apostolic vehemence. Only

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*genuine logical refining and thinking out of every member to its best form; in short, to true architecture; as the Quakers might have been if more logical. But the other part of the grand phenomenon, the reason they built so nobly, for more than the extant generation, I can only trace to the Western Church's retention of the ancient and biblical creed in monetary matters or "Catalactics," that is to say, the condemnation of "usury" (as foenus had been falsely translated) and Aristotelian denial of money begetting profits.*

much later, in 1868 when Viollet-le-Duc appeared on the scene with his completed *Dictionnaire*, did this change, but by that time Garbett had departed from the battle-ground and had, as we shall see, begun to concern himself with loftier issues than architecture. To bring this shift of interest home, it is significant that his position with regard to Viollet-le-Duc is contained not in a long article to *The Builder*, which one might have expected, but in a barely noticeable, and unusually brief letter tucked away within the pages of *The Athenaeum*.

The zeal with which he promoted his own truths in these earlier years, was sometimes so radical and fierce that one is left uncertain as to how serious he was being and in no doubt at all about how serious he was being taken. At one point he even recommended that St. Stephen Walbrook be rebuilt in *real instead of sham*

construction.<sup>7</sup> This would not only advance the cause of architecture, he argued, but even reduce the fire hazard the building was posing. The idea didn't even provoke the usual pedants into action, who were always glad of an opportunity to air their shock and horror at his latest provocation.

But George Godwin, the editor of *The Builder*, was impressed with Garbett. He encouraged the latter's religious drive to set standards and provoke reforms, allowing him all the column-space he needed for his homilies and accepting his offensiveness as an occupational hazard.<sup>8</sup> Everything,

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7. E.L. Garbett, "Natural Style in Modern England and America," *The Builder*, VIII, 408 (Nov. 30, 1850) 566-567: *Suppose its [St Stephen's Walbrook] beautiful arches, entablatures, coffered vaults, and dome were to be made in reality what they pretend to be.* p. 567.

8. At one point Godwin appended a note to one of Garbett's articles in which he explained to four unsuccessful contributors to a particular discussion,

therefore, was set for a meteoric rise in Edward Lacy Garbett's fortunes. He was preparing to become a heavy-weight within the very exciting world of architectural polemics and he was given all the room he needed.

### **Nomenclature of English Styles**

His proposal for a new system of Gothic nomenclature, for instance, was praised by a short and very rare letter to *The Builder* from Ruskin.<sup>9</sup> The latter doubted whether the names themselves were the best ones that could have been suggested, but the

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that the reason for not including their reactions was contained in the above. In other words Garbett's arguments were well worth paying attention to. The article concerned an explanation of a method on how to foliate a circle. E.L.G. "The Foliation Problem," *The Builder* IX, (Nov. 8, 1851) 702.

9. J. Ruskin, "An Historical Nomenclature for English Gothic," *The Builder*, IX (Nov. 1, 1851) 686.

principles underlying their choice were surely right. The system proposed by Garbett was based on the idea that descriptive names, such as perpendicular cannot describe more than one, or at the most two peculiarities unique to a particular style.<sup>10</sup> The use of such descriptive names, he writes, usually ends in needless academic wrangling, as one side pedantically dismisses the importance of one particular feature of the style, thereby snubbing the opposition who, on the contrary, had considered it fundamental to a proper definition it. The result, Garbett argued, was that one defeats the object of nomenclature *by rendering it an unstable thing, liable to continual improvement with every advance of our knowledge of styles, their peculiarities and their deep-buried motives.*<sup>11</sup>

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10.E.L. Garbett, "The Nomenclature of English Styles," *The Builder*, IX (Oct. 4, 1851) 619-620.

11.Ibid., p. 619.

Instead he suggests that we keep those names suggested by Rickman which are not descriptive but nominal, such as, for example, Norman and Early English, and that we substitute words such as Perpendicular and Decorated for names which do not themselves single out any aspect of their own definition. He cites the use of Doric, Ionic and Corinthian for the different classical orders as good examples of what he means. What had hitherto been called Decorated could now be named Edwardian, as the style it labels roughly coincides with the reigns of three Edwards, and that Perpendicular be named Lancastrian for a similar reason. The underlying motive being that in order for a name to be useful it must be fixed permanently, the name must not be dependent on our continually increasing knowledge of a thing, as it could then be altered progressively and render discourse and scholarship a Babylonian nightmare.<sup>12</sup>

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12.Unfortunately Garbett did not realise that even when a name is not

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### **Crystal Palace**

In an other article, where he attacks Fergusson's praise for the Crystal Palace, the old division between engineering and architecture is made the subject of further name-wrangling.<sup>13</sup> Fergusson, very enthusiastic about Paxton's building, writes that architects such as Barry, could not design a building like that because they were forced, *by the charter of their profession* to copy. Indeed Garbett does not deny this but adds that engineers, glass-

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descriptive when it is first attached to a phenomenon, there is an uncontrollable urge to make it so and fill it with meaning after the event; the most glaring example being that of Victorianism.

13. Jas. Fergusson, "The Effect on Architecture of the Building for the Great Exhibition," *The Builder*, IX (Jan. 25, 1851) 52-53. The reply came two weeks later: E.L. Garbett, "Architecture and the Exhibition," *The Builder*, IX (Feb. 8, 1851) 85-86.

house builders and Paxton are just as much copyists as the ancient architects, differing only in what they take for their model. Fair enough. But then he goes on to say that the Crystal Palace was the result of a demand to which no architect, in the proper sense of the word, could, should, or would have stooped, lamenting the fact that it was allowed the name architecture at all. The competition which was held for the Hyde Park exhibition-building had allowed insufficient time for architecture proper. Paxton had succeeded in meeting the demand for speedy results by answering the material requirements with a structure containing least expenditure of thought. The Crystal Palace might represent the greatest advance in green-house-technology, but however much a sheep grows and develops it shall never change into a goat. Architecture, being the greater thing, the matrix, includes engineering, but engineering alone can never aspire to be called architecture.

It is surprising that, despite his prophecy concerning an architecture



based on the principle of tension, Garbett did not recognise its prototype when he saw it, or, if he did recognise it, he rejected with some vehemence. In this light it is interesting to note the similarity between Garbett's criticism of the Crystal Palace and that of Ruskin. Garbett's sermon was published in February 1851. Ruskin's first attack was published a little later in the First Volume of *The Stones of Venice* in the 17th appendix entitled "Answer to Mr. Garbett".<sup>14</sup> Ruskin also lays stress on the fact of it being an oversized greenhouse (a common criticism at the time). But the resemblance gains in interest when he accuses the building of lacking on the amount of *thought* contained in it:

*The quantity of thought it [the Crystal Palace] expresses is, I suppose, a single and very admirable thought of Sir Joseph*

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14.The preface to *The Stones of Venice* is dated February 1851, the same month in which Garbett's article against the Crystal Palace was published.

*Paxton's, probably not a bit brighter than thousands of thoughts which pass through his active and intelligent brain every hour - that it might be possible to build a greenhouse larger than ever greenhouse was built before. This thought, and some very ordinary algebra, are as much as all that glass can represent of human intellect.*<sup>15</sup>

We need not go so far as trying to establish a positive influence on Ruskin, it is enough to note the steady and increased convergence of their thinking which would eventually result in Garbett rejecting his own precepts and *join the Gothic camp*.<sup>16</sup>

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15.J. Ruskin, *Works*, IX, 456.

16.Wihl (1983) 187-202. The question of Garbett's possible influence is not discussed in this article, nor is the coincidence that Ruskin's criticism of Crystal Palace should occur in an "answer to Mr. Garbett."

Garbett concludes his article by reiterating his solemn belief in the necessity to integrate the various disciplines that make up architecture in order to achieve that which constitutes its definition. Architecture, he writes, attempts the excellence of completeness, therefore if the name has been stolen by engineers, packing-case makers and green-house builders, then it needs a new name for itself, one that is unique to his concept of architecture as a material, mechanical and spiritual entity; one that is reserved exclusively to embody the idea of wholeness and completeness, he suggests: Calotecture.<sup>17</sup>

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17. An author contributing regularly to *The Builder* during this period, and who writes articles which would have Garbett's approval signs his name Calotect. cf. "Nature all Deception," *The Builder*, IX, 417 (Feb. 1, 1851) 71-72. and "Imitation versus Deception," *The Builder*, IX, 420 (Feb 22, 1851) 125. The dispute with James Ballantine concerned Ruskin's

### **St. Wren's**

In the summer of 1852 Garbett wrote a series of articles offering a radical, dubious, but at the same time highly imaginative plan for the decoration of St. Paul's. The first article was to have been named St. Wren's, a sarcastic title which the editor had changed, but which, as Garbett explained in the following instalment, he chose *in deference to public opinion* in that ...*the end of [St. Paul's] existence must be the glorification either of itself, its owners, or its author, whose monument it literally is.* St. Paul's church, is a misnomer. If it is to be a monument to the author alone and if nothing he did is ever allowed to be altered because of that we should call it St. Wren's and not a church.

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concept of deception. As far as I know Calotect has not been identified. It is not Garbett, even though their ideas do coincide on many issues.

*Wren's memory, writes Garbett, ...will be more revered and honoured by treating his monument as a living useful thing, a reality, and part of the live world, than as a dead obstructive carcass,- (...) he meant it (as all real architects have meant their works) to be (as all pieces of real architecture, church or barn, exchange or shop, have been) living, alterable and adaptable to the changing times; alterable immediately on its completion, had it failed to answer some part of its immediate purpose. (...) ..alterations to preserve or extend the life and reality of his work in better times than his own, and assimilate it more to his thwarted intentions, would not annoy but please him; and I hope to carry to his feet the news that such have been at least begun, and hear him thank God that they have.*

A building should be alive and life consists in translating usefulness into form, so that the form -the space in encloses- is properly used and not left to languish without purpose.<sup>18</sup> This attractive proposition is,

18.E.L.G. "The Conversion of St. Paul's," *The Builder*, X, 496 (Aug. 7, 1852) 497-498; St. Wren's No. II," *The Builder*, X, 497 (Aug. 14, 1852) 512-514; "St. Paul's No. III," *The Builder*, X, 499 (Aug. 28, 1852) 544-546; "Fenestration-Competition, and St.

however, stretched to limits it would never go of its own volition.

For Garbett it means that we should rebuild St. Paul's according to his own deduction of Wren's true intentions and that we should not stoop to decorating the entire great empty and largely useless shell. Wren, he reminds us in a satirical reconstruction of events, had been forced to alter his original plans as a result of his client's desire to build for fashion in an effort to keep up with the Jones's -or, in Mr Bull's case, (the client) to keep up with his French neighbours, *the Crapauds*. It was, of course, Mr. Bull's wife who was the real culprit; it was she who had suggested to her husband that *it looks so to be without a*

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Paul's," *The Builder*, X, 501 (Sept. 11, 1852) 576-577; "St. Paul's.-The Funeral and the Monument," *The Builder*, X, 507 (Oct. 23, 1852) 668-670. Reactions to the plans are Q.E.D., "In Re "E.L.G." and St. Paul's," *The Builder*, X, 497 (Aug. 14, 1852) 514; Q.E.D., "Wide and Narrow Fenestration," *The Builder*, X, 500 (Sept. 4, 1852) 564.

*cathedral..What would the Crapauds say? So I have ordered one of Mr. Christopher, and what do you think that upstart had the insolence to suggest? That we could do very well with a trumpery square thing....Now don't be persuaded into this, dear. People will set it down at once that the fire has ruined us. If Mr. Christopher can do the job well. We'll go to him for his work - not his advice. Show yourself a man of taste and spirit, Mr. Bull, and soar above his narrow utilitarian views. Of its various owners, referring to the King's and Queen's of England, Garbett writes dismissively, one, James II meant it for a Romanist church, and the rest for a show. Two purposes not quite incompatible.*

What it ultimate comes down to is that St. Paul's as a living monument to England with whatever significance does not alter the fact that Wren had been wronged. He was forced to build what he did not want to build: *Let to himself, he would have given us something like the most convenient and largest church that Protestants could use.* And on that note of surrogate altruism is

based his justification for going to the earlier Greek-cross design and starting all over again.

His advice is simple and rigorous: *..knock off from the present, all its nave and choir except the first compartment of each, and finish them like the transept arms, at the same distance from the centre.* The reason for this is not to reconstruct Wren's original design however. Rather it has to do with Inwood's experiments -which Wren had anticipated- and which define the distance at which the voice can reach audibly. By laying a tracing of the figure which Inwood had come up with and which describes the reach of the human voice, over the centre parts of St. Paul's and by turning it round you will find two optimally placed points, one for the speaker and one for the reader. By arranging the seats accordingly you will not need to place a single seat out of sight or hearing of either. And on this principle *the rest of this plan will show you how easily and conveniently the remaining furniture will fall into place and dovetails together.*

Thus St. Paul's, with the use of the latest acoustic technology is converted into a great monument, not to Englishness but to Protestantism, the preaching-barn which the Protestant truly desired and which Wren had truly intended. Garbett would, on his own authority add a whole series of galleries *quite essential to a really noble church*, (one can almost hear the Ecclesiologists grinding their teeth in anger) while the choir is to be converted into an entrance from the street by cutting the widows in the apse down to the ground! *..show that you can use a cathedral, that you know what to do with one and it will soon be decorated. Occupy it, claim it all as God's house...This is the key to its decoration.*

It is not necessary to waste space on deliberating whether Garbett considered his own suggestions for the complete rebuilding of St Paul's seriously. One Critic was hopeful that it was all a ploy only

meant to provoke discussion.<sup>19</sup> But he did. He meant every word. This was the time that Garbett was becoming increasingly immersed in religion, a puritanical religion, in which everything relative, everything worldly, all worldly authority had to give way to his sense of absolute right, his conviction of an absolute truth before which everything was glad to give way. Whether Garbett was surprised to find that few others would share his conviction is not known, but it certainly made him harden his views and make him increasingly bitter.

That is not to say, however, that a cathedral, any cathedral, had to be whitewashed and made into a typical Wesleyan preaching barn. In fact Garbett,

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19.Q.E.D. "In Re 'E.L.G.' and St. Paul's," *The Builder*, X (Aug. 14, 1852) 564: *Hardly will a writer whose views tend to upset so much of what has hitherto passed current as sound architectural doctrine and criticism, feel otherwise than disappointed should his opinions now elicit none from others..*

accused them of pursuing a false sobriety in their chapels. If he did not like the show of the papists, he had little sympathy for the affected simplicity of the Quaker's and the Wesleyan's. In fact, as the rest of the scheme is revealed it turns out that Garbett had quite a penchant for theatrical effect.

The next article concentrates on the problems light and dark, especially with regard to the central dome over the crossing. Garbett thought that *if the dome be the chief ornament, it must have the chief light*. The problem was that the isles and the nave in the present situation were relatively well-lit, while the central dome was so dark that the paintings by Thornhill could not be properly appreciated. There was no point in restoring these paintings, [which the dean and chapter had recently recommended] if they could not even be seen. In other words the situation had to be reversed, *First let there be light and then the things to be lighted*. To this end he proposed an ingenious system of mirrors to reflect the light coming down from the 24

windows in the drum up to the dome.<sup>20</sup> Secondly, Garbett observed that only a fraction of the light from the windows above the dome's eye actually falls through the eye, while most is wasted in the space between the cone and the ceiling of the inner dome. That light could be better used if the space between the dome and the cone were fitted with a *barrel-shaped light framing of wood or metal* covered with silvered glass so that the light coming from the said windows will be thrown through the eye and *fall evenly spread down the concavity to the cornice and no lower*.<sup>21</sup>

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20. ...each require three, four or five appendages of the form of lufferboards (see ill.), light frames of metal, nearly horizontal, but slanting outward, extending to the outer plane of the wall, and inward at least as far as the pilasters project. (...) The first in each window will lie on the sill, and the places of the others be determined by lines so drawn that a spectator at the furthest spot of the floor may have the near edge of each luffer just hiding the farther edge of the next above it, or may see no sky, which will give their intervals a graceful increase upwards, and make their numbers in the east and west triplets five, in the north and south four, and in the diagonal triplets three only ninety in all. Their upper sides being covered with silvered glass (about 24 feet on each) will reflect up to the dome the whole of the light now sent straight down to the spectators eye to dazzle and render it unfit to see the dome. "St. Wren's No. II," *The Builder*, X, 497 (Aug. 14, 1852) 513.

21. The exact details are as follows: suspend by tension rods (hanging through the

The windows in the nave and the isles would subsequently have to be darkened by using coloured glass, so that there would be a solemn preparatory gloom- a sort of night,-to divide day from day, -to obliterate

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upper tier of holes in the cone) a barrel-shaped light framing of wood or metal, fitting at bottom (but not necessarily resting on) the edges of the 24 feet eye, and rising to within 3 feet of the sills of the eight windows in the cone. The section of its sides must be each a portion of an ellipse, that has one focus at the sill of the opposite window above, and the other at the opposite under edge of the dome's eye below. (But a circular arc of 44 feet radius is near enough to serve in practice) Line this barrel-shaped surface (about 3,700 feet) with silvered glass, and the whole of the light it receives will, on a single reflection, be thrown through the dome's eye..., "St. Wren's. No. II," *Op. Cit.*, 513. Garbett had supplied drawings with his article, unfortunately these were not placed.

the old and introduce the new, the different, the uncommon, unworldly light of the lofty middle oratory, shed from no visible windows, casting almost no shadows, so equably showered down from the great illumined concave, that will seem to phosphoresce with a mild splendour of its own, like the moon after sunset, because the source of its light, as of hers, will be unseen, and the intervening air be hardly crossed by a ray but from itself.<sup>22</sup>

The Next article entitled "St. Paul's III, Mechanism of the Decoration," has some beautiful passages and some very interesting ideas on ornament and decoration. It starts off as a direct echo of Ruskin's *Lamp of Sacrifice* and some very quirky reasoning. A Christian temple, he writes, is not simply a church or an oratory, not simply a house of prayer and preaching, but also of praise: *Praying and preaching are not the whole of the service; in a Wesleyan barn or a Quaker chapel,*

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22."St. Wren's. No. II," *Op. Cit.*, 514.

*how should we stand up and sing, Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth?* This would clearly be unacceptable, apparently ignoring the fact that one can love very simple habitations, which I presume, was the point that God was making when he made his son come into the world in a stable. But such finer points were lost on Garbett in the heat of his obsession:

*The end and scope of all church ornament is simply to enable these passages to be sung without hypocrisy. If these psalms are to be sung in a church, it must, to avoid mockery, have beauty, splendour and refinement at least as great, at least as costly, and at least as studied and cared for as that of the people's home. It seems that if, besides an oratory and preaching-room, it is also to be a house of praise, it*

*must itself be a psalm, a standing hymn, a perpetuated chorus of thanksgiving.*<sup>23</sup>

As such in producing building the abilities of everyone have to be *harmonised* according to a *design for the designs*. That, says Garbett, is the architect's task. The architect should not do everything himself, it is his task to provide a matrix in which the abilities of everyone can have a place. One of the uses of a cathedral, he continues, *its peculiar use, is to be decorated. While it is not being decorated, it is not being used.* In other words part of the worship is to provide an ambience in which to worship.

Then we get back to the task in hand. The underlying principle of his proposed scheme is again the acoustic demands of the church. If indirect sound-waves, bouncing off hard surfaces have to travel more than 30 or 40 feet further than the

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23."St. Paul's No. III.," *The Builder*, X, 499 (Aug. 28, 1852) 544.



direct sound-waves connecting the speaker with his audience, the quality of the voice no longer has that sonorousness which is so attractive in many churches, instead the resulting echo would cause letters to be mixed up and the whole sermon to become incomprehensible. Therefore, all hard surfaces which would cause the indirect sound-waves to travel further than 30 or 40 feet extra will have to be covered with textiles.

In olden times, that is when science was not as advanced as in Garbett's day, they would have had to cover the whole church with textiles. As it is, Garbett was able to work out just exactly which surfaces would have to be treated in this way. One is the Dome from its eye down to the cornice, (i.e. the paintings are to be covered up) The cloth may be embroidered while the only other ornaments allowed are the *flatteners* holding the cloth to the dome. The result would be much like a *Crapaud* chair. The distribution of these flatteners was a matter of some concern:

*Shall they form ribs or bands, dividing the whole into panels? I think not, because I think the glory of a dome is its entirety...If a ceiling have organism in its structure, as the Greek lacunaria or Gothic Vaults, by all means show the organs and decorate them...but if the work have no organism, then you have got what you spend so much elsewhere to obtain, an unbroken surface. So instead of forthwith looking for sham organs to stick on... beautify the whole as a whole, not with forms of architecture but of nature. I would say, then, keep the surface entire; let not the figures divide it, but if them. Put as many and as large as you like, but let them be separate and distinct.<sup>24</sup>*

There is one further interesting remark which shows his continued independence from Ruskin even though on many respects their ideas continued to converge irrevocably. That is that he insisted that the material of the tapestries, the cloth itself, be made by

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24.Ibidem.

machines: *machine-work should be done by machines: for hands to do it, is returning to worse than the days of pyramid building.* In other words Garbett was far from convinced that the work of artisans was a form of liberation.

### **Dobson's Editor**

While these articles were being serialised, George Godwin reviewed a book by E. Dobson called *The Student's Guide to the Practice of Designing, Measuring and Valuing Artificers' Works* which had been newly edited by Garbett, who had added his own notes on design.<sup>25</sup> The ideas

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25. The book's original title when it came out in 1843 had been *The Student's Guide to the practice of Measuring and Valuing Artificers' Work*, London 1843. The book went through many editions, many later ones with additions from other authors, such as E.W. Tarn who frequently contributed the most complicated geometrical explanations to the pages of *The Builder*. Garbett's version went

propounded in the book need no in-depth treatment as they are basically a restatement of much that was in the *Treatise*. Having said that Garbett does come to a refinement of the ornament question, to which he may well have been inspired by Ruskin's appendix:

*By ornament, writes Garbett, in a passage that was also considered of some interest to Godwin, is properly meant something extraneous to the work, added for the sake of beauty; some thing added, observe, while decoration is only some work added. Thus decoration includes all ornament but there is plenty of true decoration which is not ornament. That only is ornament which involves either the adding of unnecessary matter (as an ancient statue, a modern tower or portico), or the leaving matter that would, with less labour and equal structural efficiency, have been removed (as a crocket, a basrelief figure) To confound, therefore (as an excellent critic has done), the terms beauty, decoration and ornament, is as new and perplexing as if we should confound blackness, blackening, and blacking.*

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through two editions, one in 1852 and the other in 1858.

He then starts off again venting his old grudge against the engineers using much the same arguments as those in the Crystal Palace sermon earlier. One aspect of his thought that does come out much clearer in this book, when compared to the *Treatise*, is the extent of his reliance on the thought of Alfred Bartholomew and John Robison. In the *Treatise* such a dependence had to be completely reconstructed from just a few casual references, whereas now both of them are revealed as primary sources. In this light the increasing vehemence against the *engineerification of architecture* should be interpreted as continuation of his harangue against the utilitarian spirit of a classic functionalism.

Garbett's reworking of Dobson's book started a discussion in *The Builder* about the fenestration of the facades of buildings, where Garbett argued for more window surface. However, the main thrust of the argument is somewhat weakened by the web of sarcasm in which it becomes entangled. This article, incidentally, gives us

the only clue that Garbett was ever involved in designing a building.<sup>26</sup>

### **A Fireproof Ceiling**

In December 1852 while Garbett was involved in a polemic about ventilation and the effects of breathing Carbonic acid,<sup>27</sup> he

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26.E.L.G. "Fenestration Competition, and St. Paul's," *The Builder*, X (Sept. 11, 1852) 576-577: ..having on my drawing-board studies for a brick building, in which all the "rationalism" (..) will be practised.., p. 576.

27.For Garbett's contributions to the polemic see the chronological bibliography. In this context it must be remembered that the problem of ventilation was at this time delaying the building of the houses of Parliament. see Port (1976). I would like to express my thanks to Charles Dunnet for referring me to this book and letting me read his thesis *A Strategy for Natural Ventilation New Parliament Building, Bridge St.*, Unpubl. **The Necessity of Architecture, Chapter Twenty**

published a curious design for the construction of a fire-proof floor-ceiling. *This flooring will, I hope be Paxtonian enough, consisting as it does, of only three invariable elements or types.* The first of these elements is a wire-meshing of interlocking metal triangles that had to be fastened to the wall-plates in the same way as canvas to an embroidery frame.<sup>28</sup> On this web of triangles, to be exact on the points where the triangles interlock, specially designed tiles in the shape of rhombi would be placed in such a way that only the point of convergence between three rhomboids, that is as the acute angle of each of the rhomboid, would be resting on the intersection of the three triangles, so that each rhomboid would not lie flat on the

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Thesis, Architectural Association, Bedford Square, 1980.

28.E.L. Garbett, "A Sanitary and Fire Proof Floor Ceiling Giving The Architect No Work At All," *The Builder*, X, 513 (Dec. 4, 1852) 765-766.

meshing but be slightly inclined. The angles, on which the rhomboids rest would be truncated at the point of contact with the wire meshing so that the resulting plane would be horizontal. The angle on the other side of the tile and on the opposite side of the tile's shorter diameter, would be similarly truncated. Because of the tiles being inclined rather than simply horizontal, their edges would have to be cut in such a way that the join between two tiles is exactly vertical.

A ceiling would emerge of a cubed pattern, criss-crossed by iron triangles. On top of the ceiling, that is, on the floor side, flat tiles could be laid with this advantage that hot-water pipes and ventilation systems could be installed in the gaps which the *cubed* tile-pattern leaves open. Even though the ceiling could, with a slight toning down of its claims of being able to span any size surface, be made to work, it is evident that the use of iron, of whatever thickness, to support it makes the whole

thing far from fire-proof.<sup>29</sup> But that is hardly the point. What it represents is a clear attempt on the part of Garbett to come up with the desired goods, that is, a tensile system of construction. That is its importance and that is where it represents a noble failure.

### **The Preliminaries to Good Building**

In 1856, Garbett published his manifesto in Weale's *Papers and Practical Illustrations of Public Works*, entitled: "Preliminaries to Good Building," in which he suggested rules for the proper conduct of architect and patron, the process of selecting designs by competition, the precise way an architect should be remunerated for his efforts and some rules of thumb for beauty.<sup>30</sup> The style

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29. I would like to express my thanks again to Charles Dunnet for giving his opinion on Garbett's design.

30. E.L. Garbett, "Preliminaries to Good Building," in *Papers and Practical Illustrations of Public Works*, London 1856, Paper IX, pp. 95 - 104.

of its prose arouses a pathos similar to that of the rantings of speakers on Hyde Park corner. His enthusiasm runs away with him into a hopelessly dogmatic catechism of *orders of Stability* and *degrees of Beauty* which because of their stringent classification make them immediately unappealing and hopelessly impractical. It is not that Garbett is not motivated by good intentions, nor that all of his ideas are bad. But because of his awkward systematisation of principles and because of its un-business-like proposals with regard to the relation between client and architect it becomes a manifesto which, right from the start undermines its own aims as well as the good ideas it contains.

However, it starts off with some promise. The projector, he argues, must, before seeking any designer, be able to state clearly what he wants. That is, how many apartments, for what purposes and of what capacity. So far so good. Then he goes on to state that the projector must also be able to specify *which of the Five orders of Stability, should be attempted* and

consequently *which of the Four degrees of Beauty*. The first have to do with what kind of building is desired, while the last divide into whether the client wants structural beauty alone; or should add, besides this floral ornament; or besides both these, animal ornament; or besides all these, historic art. If one looks back at the *Treatise* at this point, one can only see a gross simplification of his earlier ideas. The subtlety of his earlier conditions has been severely compromised by an increasing devotion to system and the ideas of Ruskin, which, in Garbett's hands, do not convey the same magic nor appear as compelling when compared to their originals as stated in the *Seven Lamps* or in the *Stones of Venice*. In fact they somehow show up Ruskin's crude philosophical tools when his precepts are bereft of their lyrical presentation.

Ultimately Garbett comes up with three fundamental precepts to meet the various *aesthetic obstacles to good building*. They are: 1. No stucco features. In cities no stucco externally at all; 2. No

unnecessarily costly material except for a gain either of durability or colour, or to receive carving. And 3. to imitate as ornaments nothing but natural objects. There we have it, Garbett and Ruskin's image have finally been welded into some improbable hybrid monster.

Another piece of advice concerns the procedures to be followed during the competition: *It is absolutely necessary to have nothing to do with any designer who proposes, as a part of his design, any ornament that he could not execute for himself*. Here is Ruskin floating through again, but then:

*For public buildings, the designers must at first, for a few years, be found by public and open competition, subject to the above condition; so that every competitor must produce, along with his design of the whole structure, a full-sized model [!] or specimen of the most important or difficult ornament (whether it be a birth of Minerva or a brick moulding).*

By this time most practically minded architects in an age which made a cult of practicality, must have started smiling to

themselves. But such fears did not disturb Garbett: no drawings except plans, were to be allowed; all drawings are deceptive. All architects had to explain themselves by way of a model. Drawings of elevations, he wrote, were particularly evil as they are far too misleading, giving a greater sense of depth than the budget would probably allow for. Once the successful architect had been chosen for the undertaking, we get to the problem of remuneration.

The most significant passage in the *Preliminaries* discusses the way that architects should be paid. He believed that paying an architect a percentage on outlay was evil, as it brought all sorts of possibilities for corruption and deception in its wake. Instead he suggests that the winner of the competitions should be paid for his design. Subsequently the architect should receive a daily salary for superintendence of the building project, and thirdly, he should receive a fee on the successful completion of the project. This, to all intents and purposes, sounds like plain good sense. In order to safeguard fairness

at the competition, a huge and improbable bureaucratic apparatus of certificates, officials and judges is rubbed from the oil-lamp, which it is not necessary for us to go into.

For some reason this problem of remuneration became an obsession with Garbett. Every article he published in *The Builder*, after 1856 is full of the most bitter comments on *Percentage Styles* and *percentage on outlay-architects*. Why? That is a difficult question. He never airs his own experience even though he is quite happy to use every opportunity to spout poison on the system. Because of his relentless condemnation of everything and everyone who had anything to do with this system, most of those who felt themselves under attack, were invariably and understandably affronted by the strength of Garbett's words and responded accordingly. One offended competitor wrote in reply to Garbett:

*Vociferated logic kills me quite,-*

A noisy man is always in  
the right;  
I twirl my thumbs, fall back  
upon my chair,  
Fix on the wainscot a  
distressful stare,  
And when I hope his  
blunders are all out,  
Reply discreetly, - to be  
sure - no doubt.<sup>31</sup>

The sad truth is that Garbett had begun to make a habit of overstating his case, had used up other people's patience, and as a result had become quite ineffectual. The slightest contradiction to his ideas, whether it concerned the remuneration of architects or the deceptive use of materials in building, was treated by him without any sense of proportion, not as a misdemeanour but as a felony, a

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31.'A Competitor for the Block Plan,'  
"Correspondence on the Westminster  
Designs," *The Builder*, XV (June 13, 1857)  
337-338.

monstrosity, and was viciously attacked with heaps of blunted sarcasm. The result of all this wasted anger was that he could hardly be taken seriously. He frittered away his standing as well as his good ideas in absurd totalitarian rantings, hitting out at everybody and everything, being insulting and high-handed. But despite this, one cannot quite understand why he became so obsessed with the problem of pay unless he was himself a victim of this supposedly unfair and corrupt system.<sup>32</sup>

### **The Whitehall Competition: The Percentage Style and Gothic**

As time went on Garbett became an increasingly hardened adversary in any polemic, always insisting on the last word. But this attitude had its consequences, his

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32.This was not, however the case in 1865, when he described himself as a layman. Edward L. Garbett, "The Trade and trade Charges of Architects," *The Builder*, XXIII (Nov. 11, 1865) 798-799.



views, though always of a peculiar honesty and often hitting a particularly vulnerable soft-spot in his adversary's argument, nevertheless began to lose their relevance. He was fighting his own battle it seemed, no-one else appeared interested in his tirades any longer. The sparkles in his thinking became too difficult to find amidst the tortuous sentences and the continual sarcasm.

In a lengthy but somewhat frameless review of the designs for the Whitehall competition of 1856 for a new masterplan as well as the new government buildings, Garbett finally renounced classicism and the Renaissance.<sup>33</sup> They could, despite his provisional support for them in the *Treatise*, no longer be seen as appropriate styles for

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33.E.L. Garbett, "Notes on Each of the Westminster Block Plans," *The Builder*, XV (May 23, 1857) 285-287. The actual conversion takes place in the subsequent article called "The percentage style," *The Builder*, XV (June 6, 1857) 320.

the present. Why this public U-turn? Part of the reason was his wish for architectural variety, so that each building housing a specific function could somehow be distinguished from its neighbours. Garbett was an early critic against architectural standardisation:

*It is now known to most people, that these principles [making the least amount of external design go as far as you can, round as much and as many buildings as possible] are foreign to mediaeval art, but not to so many that they are equally foreign to the ancient or the classical, which in fact only differed from the Mediaeval in one point, and agreed with it in all those that distinguish it from ours. Neither Ancients nor Mediaevals ever dreamed of making two offices look like one, or making two things that had not the same function alike, or one design to serve for both. All this is purely modern, original, and unprecedented, in short, the invention of modern architects, who are falsely accused of wanting invention.*

It was this standardised quality which made symmetry exact and French, where buildings are placed exactly in line, where roads are unbearably straight and where the facades of different offices became

uniform, rather than *natural* where the left side of the face is always slightly different to the right. This Frenchness was the straw that finally made him renounce the renaissance or modern style:

*But as "modern" is a word continually changing its meaning, so that, by-and-by, what we call "modern" will be a past style, I prefer giving it a chronological name, like the Norman, or Tudor, which, you will observe, does not imply any connection between the style and the people or family after which it is named, but merely a correspondence in time. Thus you see that any historical fact which is found to synchronise with a particular style of art, however unconnected, may be taken as a chronological mark to name it by. Now the style we call "Modern" or "Renaissance," both in planning and decoration, cannot as far as I can see, be found to synchronise with any dynastic accession, or other great public event; but I have observed it to synchronise most remarkably with a fact in the internal history of our profession, namely the custom of architects or engineers being paid in proportion to the work of those under them; or, as Sir Benjamin Hall's paper of instruction says, "a commission of so-and-so per cent upon the outlay." Of course this is not so high-sounding an event as the Conquest and the Reformation; but we must be content with what synchronises, and so I will mark this*

*as the "Per-centage-on-the-outlay Style," or briefly, "Perc. St."*

This manner of paying architects had by now become one of the most virulent cancers in his thinking, even penetrating his pamphlets on religion, which must only have served to weaken any argument he was putting forward. In fact it was to be the theme of most of his subsequent contributions to *The Builder*, even weaving itself through subjects which would appear totally unconnected. But we shall return to this, having brought it up here specifically to provide the context to his imminent conversion to the Gothic camp, which was to be announced in the next article.

The deluge of bad Renaissance designs in this competition had, according to Garbett, *provided the effectual coup de grace to classicism*. It need hardly be said what the reason was for this conversion: apart from two designs, (no. 35 and no. 106) one of which stood no chance of being taken seriously, none of the 218 designs exhibited, had been up to

Garbett's standards of moral integrity. This connected with the fact that any designs submitted in the Gothic style would not even be considered seriously, that classical and Renaissance had been pre-selected as the desired style for the offices had so irked Garbett that he was prepared to jump down from a fence he had initially tried to deny the very existence of, and finally entering the Gothic camp.

Once he was completely converted to the belief that Gothic should be the style in which to build until a new pure system of architecture was developed, he lost no time to consolidate his conversion. He began attacking the architect George Wightwick, a determined classicist, who had given his support to the preference shown by the committee running the Whitehall competition for a classic design.<sup>34</sup>

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34.E.L. Garbett, "Mr. Wightwick and the Classicists," *The Builder*, XV (June 27, 1857) 360-361 & *The Builder*, XV (July 4, 1857) 373-374. The retort by George Wightwick and by "James C." are

Garbett was suddenly of the opinion that classic architecture was no more than a *stupendous delusion*. He did meekly repeat that he did not equate Gothic automatically with truth, but the statement was no more than an empty echo. Tu quoque, Garbett had finally released his principles and had opted for the easier alternative of style-apology.

But Garbett's conversion to Ruskin and to Gothic brought no new arguments in its wake. His weapons became blunt and his style of fighting predictable, repetitive and confusing, while that of George Wightwick was whipped into poetic flights, two weeks after Garbett's barrage, Wightwick published a five column-long poem in *The Builder* called "The Battle of the Styles, A Hudibrastic Epic" which lightened and diffused Garbett's confused criticisms.<sup>35</sup>

### The Architect

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contained in *The Builder* XV (July 11, 1857) 384-385.

35. *The Builder*, XV (July 18, 1857) 403-404.

In 1857 he had described himself as a non-percentage architect, which may hint at his failure to succeed in his practice.<sup>36</sup> Eight years later he described himself as a layman who had dealings with architects and builders and was likely to have them in the future, but who certainly had never touched a commission or a percentage. One is led to doubt whether he was ever a practising architect. The only competition he is known to have entered, the one held in 1859 for Mr Spurgeon's Newington Tabernacle was given to another.<sup>37</sup> What was he though? The patent he took out in 1884 describes Garbett as a draughtsman, but in a sense, even if it is accurate, it cannot be a complete answer to the question. His intellectual range was too

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36.E.L. Garbett, Non-Percentage Architect, "The Percentage Style," *The Builder*, XV (June 6, 1857) 320.

37.Harper (1983) entry for London 1859. The competition was won by E. Cookworthy Robins.

great, his personal vendetta against the system of architectural pay and competition too bitter for him to have been confined happily to the position of draughtsman. His will, incidentally, mentions a collection of his drawings which was to be left to one of his cousins.<sup>38</sup> Considering his range of interests and his continual urge to vent his solutions to all manner of problems in public, it would seem acceptable that he was a draughtsman only in so far as he needed a paid occupation. His knowledge and use of mathematics, mechanics, theology, geology, optics, philosophy, history and so forth, rather suggests that Garbett had wanted to set himself up as a secular prophet, a philosopher and an inventor.

At his failure to be hailed as the new messiah in architectural criticism, his ambition, perversely, took on ever greater forms. If the fools, and he treated most of his fellow colleagues like fools, would not

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38.The original will is kept in Hants. Record Office.

accept his pearls of wisdom, he would cast them out with greater ferocity just to show them what a mistake they had made. His defence of Ruskin's ideas, and his attempts to equate them with his own, trying desperately to ameliorate earlier differences, almost became an exercise in sycophancy. Ruskin, probably unaware of it himself, was used as an intellectual backdrop, to boost Garbett's own authority. If Ruskin had not been Garbett's 'master' when the *Treatise* was first published, he had begun to occupy that position by the late fifties and sixties in a very literal sense. Doubtless Garbett thought that he and Ruskin shared some common cause. Ruskin became Garbett's model, as such it is neither ironic nor curious that both Ruskin and Garbett suffered from similar delusions about their ability to reform the whole of society rather than just its art and architecture. As their aesthetics was so consciously bound up with ethical considerations, with morality, it was only natural to extend those ethical considerations to other areas of humanity.

The more Garbett's arguments were rejected, the more determined he became in his belief of their implicit rightness, and the more ferocious became his attacks on what he defined as mindlessness, but which included everything which presumed to contradict or qualify what he said. Almost all his critics, or those at least who bothered to retaliate to his denunciations, complained of his rudeness. But he didn't listen, he was inundated by his own principles and the subsequent need to propound their validity in the most unequivocal and rigorous terms. Slowly his messianic ambitions spiralled upwards leaving architecture behind, embracing cosmology, sciences, theology and finally the complete reform of society. This aspect of his character provides us with the answer to Garbett's failure to fulfil those earlier more modest architectural expectations.

His career, so beautifully tended in the late forties and early fifties turned out to be a non-starter. In a sense he could not but have failed, his ideas for reform were too subtle in the early years and too brusque in

the following. Often his suggestions were so totalitarian as to be completely impracticable and his unwillingness to compromise too great an obstacle to the dispersal of his obstinate pride. When his prospects for a successful career in architecture were disappointed he must have chosen a career in inventing.