

**STAINED GLASS WINDOWS: AN
ESSAY. WITH A REPORT TO THE
VESTRY ON STAINED GLASS
WINDOWS FOR GRACE CHURCH,
LOCKPORT, NEW YORK**

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Stained Glass Windows: An Essay. With a Report to the Vestry on Stained Glass Windows for Grace Church, Lockport, New York by William Frederic Faber

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NOTE.

The first edition of the *Report on Stained Glass Windows for Grace Church, Lockport*, which appeared in January, 1897, is now exhausted; as there is a constant demand for it, a second is deemed necessary; and the occasion seemed favorable for a little further talk about Windows and Glass. Hence this pamphlet.

The project of four years ago is no longer an insubstantial dream. Since that time eleven windows and three mosaics have been placed in Grace Church; in them all the adopted scheme has been followed, with results more and more obviously satisfactory.

Although intending this pamphlet, in the first instance, simply for a guide to his own people, to lead them to a more discriminating appreciation: the author is encouraged to hope, by many expressions from the outside, that it will, even more than the earlier *Report*, be of service beyond his parish; that it may perhaps stimulate elsewhere also a study of Church Glass, and the erection of true Church Windows.

W. F. F.

Grace Church Rectory, Lockport, All Saints',
1900.

STAINED GLASS WINDOWS.

The subject is certainly one of present interest. The advertisements of firms who produce stained glass windows are numerous and conspicuous in our Church weeklies; glowing accounts of memorials just erected in this place and that make up a large part of our "Diocesan News." To say nothing of the fact that we are in danger of forgetting what the real business of the Church is,—that it is not primarily to build and beautify edifices, but to save men and to establish righteousness in the earth; the uncomfortable question is forced upon us: For how much of this "embellishment" of our churches will posterity thank us?

A revival of religious art we welcome with profound gratitude. But when for the moment it threatens to take the form of an epidemic of stained glass, our joy may be turned to apprehension. Stained glass is simply becoming fashionable; everybody is beginning to want some of it because 'all the other churches are getting some;' commercial enterprise stimulates a well-meaning zeal, taking advantage, too, of a vulgar spirit of rivalry; and the end thereof must be painful to contemplate. Individuals are often given a free

hand in God's House on the ground that thus several hundred or several thousand dollars will be secured for "enrichment;" and so the work goes merrily on.

And such things can be because there is a lack of knowledge. Persons may have the best intention in the world; their experience in other, different fields may have been very wide; in a general way they may have good taste; moreover, they may possess a long purse and a liberal disposition; perhaps they may think to save themselves from going wrong by putting the whole matter into the hands of strongly advertised window-makers. But none of these things will supply the lack of a knowledge of stained glass. There is nothing for it but study and education. The clergy first of all, and after them the vestries, must inform themselves on the subject as thoroughly as possible. In the meantime, let them be slow to lend themselves to anything which they later, or those who come after them, might bitterly deplore and be helpless to remedy.

Nor is it to-day so forbidding a task to get this knowledge as it was but a few years ago. Then one had to go to the libraries in our largest cities, and laboriously gather from rare works the history and principles of this art. Now there is fortunately at least one single volume, easily obtainable, which may serve as a

text-book to all who desire to study the subject. Mr. Lewis F. Day has given us in his *Windows: A Book about Stained and Painted Glass*, published in London, 1897, by B. T. Batsford, imported by the Scribners, just that information which is needed. No vestry that has the matter of Stained Glass Memorials before it should permit its rector to be without this book; he should read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest it; but not he only; they also, at least the members of any committee responsible for such work; and intending donors likewise, who desire to have a controlling voice in regard to memorials to be erected. This is too important a thing to enter upon recklessly or at the dictation of mere fancy.

Meanwhile it may not be out of place to tell briefly and simply what stained glass windows in a church ought to be; and what stained glass itself is.

Stained glass windows are still, after all, windows: and windows are essential component parts of a building. If in a church, the axiom applies the more inevitably: a church is a building presumed to conform rigidly to a certain type; and therefore, the idea which the whole is to exhibit and impress must not for a moment be hidden or dissipated by any component part.

Our dwelling houses may be often built in a haphazard way, with a view simply to utility, regardless of style, laying no claim to architectural art. But to build a church so is an offense, an offense to art, and, we believe, an offense to religion also. A church building is presumed and expected to have a certain character, technically called "style," dignifying and elevating God's House above our common houses, even though it be small and plain and not costly; small and plain it may be, and not costly, but it must not be tawdry or incongruous or mean.

Now a window is, as we have said, a component part of the building. In a church well conceived, the window is inevitable just as it is: to make it larger or smaller, to close one up where now there is one or to make one where there is none, is just so far to do violence to the building. If such a change does not violate the integrity of the building as a whole, the fact simply goes to show that the building had no plan worthy of honor.

The window-space is therefore always to be preserved for window use — just such and just so much as the architect gave us. The use of a window (barring for the moment the unscientific one of ventilation) is to give light while still affording shelter. And this light-space is also to serve artistically as a kind of balance to the dark space of the solid

wall; hence this light-space is to art sacred, and must be permitted to the end to assert itself as just what it is and such as it is, so much rightly apportioned and correctly proportioned translucent wall-space.

When this window-space has been first filled with a plain glass, which is then to give way to stained glass, the new treatment must say, just as obviously, only more beautifully, what the old said: it must still be a window—letting in light, though now the light is colored—and in its architectural value it must be just what it was before, asserting the shape and the design of the structural window, plainly and faithfully.

In other words, the true stained glass window—in a church building worthy of that name—is not now to give the beholder the impression that he is looking out through an opening and seeing, of something beyond, so much as the size of the opening will permit: in a word, the spectacular impression of looking into some beautiful out-door world through a hole in the wall. The beholder must be conscious still of looking at the wall itself, the translucent part of it, which confines him within the edifice as much as the stone or the brick. Nor yet is the true stained glass window merely a colored glass picture covering so much wall area: the outline form is to be so

obvious, and the treatment so non-realistic, that the architectural idea may never for a moment be in danger of submersion under some other idea.

For, as is true in general of decorative art as contrasted with pictorial art, the true church window is to be designed without perspective, without shadow, without attempt at realistic effect. It is to be conventional, symbolical; with that intent it may utilize as it will forms, colors, attitudes, postures, accessories, fearless of the criticism that 'this saint or that scene never in the world looked like that.' No intelligent person standing before decorative painting would for a moment think of demanding a representation of the actual. That, frankly, was not its object.

And the stained glass church window will further fulfill its particular end if all round the figure or group, or whatever be the subject matter of the composition, there runs a clear line or border of differently colored glass, making a clear demarcation from the stone wall; drawing again, as it were, the architect's line of his window construction.

All of which is but to say that windows were made for the sake of the building, and so must remain; not that a building was made for the sake of windows,—for the sake of furnishing so much space for