

GERMAN ETCHER FINDS OUR SKYSCRAPERS BEAUTIFUL

What Is More Hermann Struck Is Here to Work Out His Impressions, in Sketches, Hoping to Win for Our Much-Abused Architecture International Recognition.

THE skyscrapers of American cities, which have been regarded heretofore with supercilious amusement by artists of the world and barred as gawk and grotesque architectural freaks and exaggerated excrescences of the imagination from the realm of things artistic and beautiful, have come into their own; they have found their first enthusiastic champion abroad in one of the leading German artists of the day. Thrilled by the memory of them and lured back by an overwhelming love of their towering zigzagged outlines against the sky, Hermann Struck, recognized throughout Europe as one of the finest German landscape and portrait etchers of the present time, has returned to this country to take a longer look at the gigantic architectural marvels he glimpsed in a brief stay here last year. It is his purpose, by working out a wider and fuller cycle of sketches in which to preserve his impressions, to win for the much-mocked American skyscrapers, if he may, international recognition as works of real artistic grandeur and beauty. For to Struck the American skyscrapers are precisely as ugly as the Alps are ugly. And yet, the Alps themselves were once generally regarded as ugly rubbish heaps swept up by a kindly nature to ward off the rough winds of the north from fair and sunlit Italy.

What part Byron and other foreign romanticists played in telling Europe the artistic truth about the Alps, that Struck, if his purpose holds, may play in rehabilitating in the good graces of Dame Art her scorned and disowned giant child, the skyscrapers of this and other cities of the United States. And, architecturally speaking at least, the skyscraper, according to Struck, is really the only child of Dame Art born in this country, just as the negro and Indian songs are her only purely American children in the realm of music.

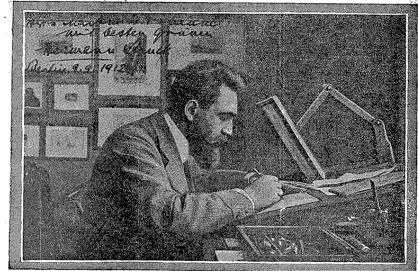
"And I like those, too, immensely," said Mr. Struck, "especially your American negro songs. As for the skyscrapers, I can scarcely put in words the tremendous thrill and love I feel for them. In Berlin, my comrades laugh at me when I tell them of that. But it is that which has brought me back to your country. The view of your city of giant buildings is to me simply overpowering. There is no finer sight than that of Manhattan Island with its closely huddled giant buildings as you sail toward it from

the bay. I feel the spell of it whenever I walk upon your streets. There is nothing like it in all the world. I am going over to Brooklyn at the earliest possible opportunity to get a view from there of the grand complex of wonderful buildings of lower Manhattan and to study it from many points of view and many, many days."

"And yet, it is not each individual skyscraper that thrills me or seems beautiful to me, but rather the groups of them everywhere throughout your city, towering above the busy streets where, all unconcerned, even unconscious of them, your people walk or jogtrot hour after hour of every day, going about their business as though there were no such giant wonderland around and above them.

"Some of your individual skyscrapers, for example, I do not like at all. The Metropolitan Building, for instance, I do not find so admirable, and others which, like it, are copies of buildings or monuments in the older countries. To me the skyscraper appeals as fine architecture if it is not only grand but also appropriate, not if it is a copy of some other building. Why, for example, should the Metropolitan Building, a first-class, useful commercial office building of a busy American life insurance company, be a copy of the Campanile, the bell-tower of Venice? Or why should your Pennsylvania Station, with its rumbling, roaring trains and shrieking whistles and medley of travelers, porters, and baggage smashers, be copied after a Grecian temple? There is as little reason why a life insurance building should be a bell-tower or a railroad station like a Grecian temple as for an American produce merchant or stock broker to wear the turban of a Turkish doctor.

"On the other hand, such tall buildings as Wanamaker's, built for and simply suggestive of gigantic mercantile purposes, seem to me admirable examples of the truly impressive skyscraper. I do not object in the least, mind you, to the use of classic style in the skyscraper. The Times Building, for example, seems to me a beautiful building—it is far simpler and more appropriate to its uses than either the Metropolitan Tower or the Pennsylvania Station. It is only when a building is forced into a copied shape not its own that it loses its appeal. In short, the rule I should apply to skyscrapers as well as to any other form of architecture, is simply this: A house must not try to be something that it is not.



"Just what is the basis of the tremendous artistic appeal in the groups of your skyscrapers I have not yet been able to analyze. As a matter of fact, I feel that your skyscrapers have not yet found their complete harmony; that there is something newer and better still to come before that is accomplished. But you are on your way; you will evolve it presently."

Mr. Struck managed to fasten into permanent shape in sketches several impressions of skyscrapers he gathered in his first brief visit to this country. One of the best of these is a sketch of the lower end of Manhattan Island as it appeared to him, tiny and closely huddled together, with its multitude of tall buildings, upon his first sailing up the bay toward it. He has sketches, more impressionistic and less clearly defined than even this, of various groups of skyscrapers of this city and Chicago. Pointing to one sketch, representing a group of skyscrapers on Michigan Avenue, Chicago, but not altogether unsuggestive of a group of Chicago grain elevators to the vulgar, uninitiated, and inartistic eye, he explained:

"You see, what interests me so tremendously in the skyscraper is the contour, the silhouette of these great buildings standing beside others and outlined against the sky. To me they then seem like our old castles on steep cliffs and mountain heights in the old lands of Europe. I do not care to see each window in such buildings, nor to portray all the windows and other unimportant details in my sketches. It is the general impression that I want to catch and preserve."

It is not only with respect to the American skyscraper that Hermann Struck has raised his voice in defense and championing of the new in art. Himself a lover of all that is beautiful in the old, he has steadily decried the tendency shown in many art circles to value and worship good names instead

of good quality in art—poor pictures with good names signed or ascribed to them. There is too much good art of modern times condemned, he feels, through this eagerness to gather in and preserve poor art to which, rightfully or wrongfully, the name of some great master of old has been linked.

"The Boston Museum," he said, "is an excellent example of American appreciation of modern art. While there, as in every museum, there may be found some works of the authenticity of which there has been question, this museum contains, aside from all its other art treasures, a very wonderful collection of modern French impressionistic pictures, as perhaps no other museum in the United States; and its Director has shown himself beyond any doubt an expert who understands how to appraise and collect truly valuable works of modern art."

In his life, as in his work, Hermann Struck is himself a most striking example of the reconciliation between the new and the old, the very old—between modern culture and the oldest ideals and traditions of his ancient Jewish faith. He is to-day the associate of men in every rank and sphere of life, men of all shades of opinion, from Hauptmann to Erich Schmidt, from Bebel to Haeckel. To all of them he is an intellectual and social equal, a contemporary teacher and fellow-worker in the modern world. Yet he is of all men the most observant of time-honored Jewish customs, the most steeped in Jewish patriotism. His artistic themes, aside from his wonderful portraits, are manifold, ranging from Holland to Tyrol, from Ramsgate to Sweden, from modern Egypt to the Jersey Palisades. But the works into which he has thrown his soul are those that deal with Jews and Jewish scenes—old rabbis, the grave of Rachel, the great Hebrew scholars, the going out of the Sabbath. These are marked by an unequalled fervor and honesty and deep sympathy that leave no doubt of the race and sentiment of the man. It is Struck's motto with respect to persons as well as with respect to houses that one must not try to be something one is not.

Early in life he came under the influence of Theodore Herzl, the great Zionist leader, whom, by the way, he strongly resembles in appearance and whose portrait, among many other notables of his day, he has painted from life. But while laboring zealously for the establishment of the Zionist movement in Germany, Struck himself went further, clinging to greater orthodoxy in the Jewish religion and later assuming the leadership of the so-called Misrachi movement, which may be described as pietistic Zionism. This movement accepts the conclusion of Zionism that the Jews must find a

legally assured home in Palestine, but meanwhile its adherents observe every jot and tittle of the old Jewish law and traditions. Struck, personally, born in Germany and associating with the most Teutonic of Germans, goes almost to extremes in his observance of the Mosaic code, and zealously, but very calmly, undergoes every discomfort and annoyance that such observance may entail.



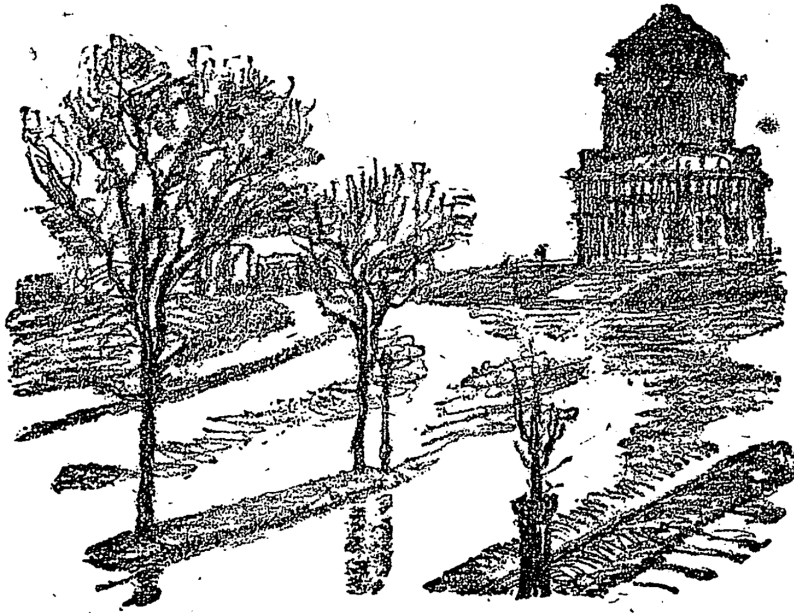
His attitude on this subject is well-known to his Christian friends, and is thoroughly respected by them. He has traveled widely in many countries of Europe, and in Egypt and Palestine; and the customs and institutions of many of those lands were not fashioned for strict observance of the Mosaic code. But in all of them, even as in his own home, the young Jewish artist managed to live in strictest accordance with the ancient customs and traditions of his people and faith. On his pilgrimage to Palestine, he carried with him a supply of "Macholconserven" or kosher preserved meats prepared in strict accordance with the orthodox Jewish ritual. Even now, in his wardrobe at the Hotel Netherlands, he has a good supply of such "Macholconserven," in a stack of well-wrapped tins; for he is shortly to undertake a trip to California, to see this country in its entirety, and he knows that outside of New York City he is going to encounter many cities and towns which know not the meaning of "kosher," and where his co-religionists have in many respects compromised with regard to the Mosaic law. And with his stack of preserved meats he has also his own dishes in which to eat them, absolutely uncontaminated by forbidden elements. The surprising thing about the young artist is that he seems utterly unaware that there is, in this his strict adherence to the principles of his ancient faith, anything odd or unusual. To him it is as natural for him to live so as for persons not of his faith to live according to their customs, nothing more.

Struck's art may be called a Jewish art, not only because the artist himself

lives the life of an observant Jew. He is not content to denominate as Jewish art all that is produced by Jews. To be Jewish art, he holds, a picture produced by a Jewish painter must show qualities possible only to a Jewish soul—in other words, must be painted by a Jew in such a way as to show forth the emotions and passions of his own people and his own life in the midst of them. Jewish scenes,

Jewish historical paintings, as such alone, do not deserve to be called Jewish art. They must show they have been inspired by a Jewish consciousness, a Jewish soul.

"A masterpiece of Jewish art in this sense," said Mr. Struck, "is the celebrated picture, 'Ben Ami,' or, as it is called in Dutch 'De Zoon van het oude Volk,' ('The Son of the Ancient People,') by the illustrious master, Josef Israels, undoubtedly one of the greatest painters of the century. This depicts an old Jewish peddler on the threshold of an old clo'se shop. One sees musty garments, old faded metal lamps, umbrellas, rags, and a hundred other second-hand articles. The subject is therefore, a very simple one; there is no pose, no sentimentality. And nevertheless, the sad eyes of the old dealer, gazing off into the distance, personify, as his whole physiognomy does, all the pains and sorrows, the utter resignation of the Jewish people through all the centuries—and perhaps also a ray of hope for a better future; and one can justly assert of this picture that a non-Jewish painter could never have painted it. It is true that one can trace certain non-Jewish elements, as for example some influences of Rembrandt, in this painting as well as in all of Israels' work; but the dominating note—and that is the most important—is Jewish. When the spirit of the milieu overcomes this Jewish spirit the artist ceases to be a Jewish artist or his work to be Jewish art. When, however, as in the case of Israels or Hirzenberg, the Jewish soul is stronger than the influences of the adopted land of the artist's birth, then his work can be called really Jewish art."



Grant's Tomb by Herr Struck.

This Jewish note is reflected throughout Struck's work, in a genuine sympathy and unmistakable love for things Jewish. His "Sabbatausgang" shows a vigorous strong-faced Jew bending over the spices, while before him flickers the Sabbath candle and behind him silently hover the shadows. Polish and Russian Jews, with rough-cast faces and long beards and unfathomable eyes, have afforded continual scope for his etching needle. Old men especially have always delighted him; for he depicts rather peace and quiet than struggle and tumult, and his masters here have been Rembrandt and Israels. In his "Polnischer Rabbiner," (which has been acquired by the Berliner Kupferstichkabinett,) one sees the pain-narrowed eyes, the wrinkled forehead, the high cheekbones, sharply illumined on the dark background of hair and skull cap and beard.

Or take his "Alter Mann mit Weisssem Bart," better known as the "Polnischer Judge." Here one sees that mere Chauvinistic flattery of a Jewish subject, but an honest picture of a genuine, even if by no means perfect, man. Savagery and pride are there, and strength of will bespeaking almost ruthlessness. But that savagery and pride is of the intellect and of the emotions; that strength of will is of the ideals; that ruthlessness is exercised on the spiritual shams of life. The black fur cap set low and a little askew on a forehead ridged and furrowed with thought, the open and brilliant eyes that speak of firm convictions warily and friendly regarding an opponent cause, the gathered skin under the eyes that reveal the age

of the flesh in gentle contrast with the youth of the spirit, the powerful nose, the concealed sensual lips, the rich hair that seems to resist the blanching touch of years—this is a type of the Jew that has lived again and again throughout the centuries, but which can be truly seen and depicted only by one who truly knows and understands the soul of his people. Again and again one finds such genuinely Jewish types throughout Struck's work, notably also in his portraits of famous Jewish scholars, many of them his personal friends.

Struck himself might well furnish a model for an etching of this very sort. Accounts of his life tell that he originally intended to study as a rabbi; but this, Mr. Struck explained, he had once told one of his historians, half in jest, as the best method of reconciling the historian to his manner of living and study, and thereafter other chroniclers took it up seriously. He had always been deeply interested in Jewish learning, and began to study the Talmud at the age of 9 years. He continues his studies therein even now, and at his home in Berlin, almost every day, when he alights from his horse after his morning ride, his Talmudist awaits him in his studio, and together they pore over the wisdom of their ancient sages. Though himself a young man—he is only 36 years old—Struck is already accounted old in the learning of his people. Modest of his own attainments, he is filled more with reverence than pride because of his Jewish scholarship. He speaks Hebrew flu-

ently, and often marks his etchings with the initials of his Hebrew name, Chalm Aaron ben David, together with a six-pointed star of David.

Yet despite the strong anti-Semitic sentiment in artistic and cultural circles of many of the lands where Struck's paintings have been exhibited, and Struck's proud avowal of his race and faith, he has been greeted with almost universal acclaim not only in Germany, but also in Denmark, Russia, Holland, Italy, and France. In England, despite the jealous prejudice existing between that country and Germany in almost every field of endeavor, Struck was elected a member of the London Royal Society of Painters, Etchers, and Engravers, an honor accorded to no other German artists except Hans Meyer and Herkomer.

Struck's work shows a rich variety in subject and treatment. It falls into two parts—landscape and character

portraits. Out of the former speaks a note of soft, sentimental yearning; out of the latter earnest, mature, manly strength of soul. Among his landscapes may be found subjects widely different: Little lyric, impressionistic sketches, snow landscapes, as in his well-known "Aus Agnetendorf"; still, melancholy water mirrorings, as in "Aus Wannsee," and then, again, close stuffy scenes of the picturesque metropolis, as in his "Vom Rande Berlins"; the giant mountains and the strand of Scheveningen, the towers of Notre Dame, English hunting lodges, Heine's grave, scenes from Lake Geneva. Then, in one cycle of pictures, he shows the land of his forefathers and the modern Jewish villages therein. Sultry air trembles over Jerusalem as it stretches before his yearning gaze, from the Mount of Olives. He shows us the Tower of David and the Grave of Absalom, the well of Jaffa and the grave of Rachel, ruins of the crusades in Palestine, the dreary flatness of the Dead Sea, graves of the patriarchs in Hebron, and alleys of palms in the new Jewish hamlets.

His portraits abound in character studies of old men and peasants, beggars and vagabonds, rabbis and philosophers. All of them speak of great and deep experience and troubles, bitterness, pain, and the disillusioning of years—not only the years of individuals, but the pain-wrecked, hunted years of fathers and forefathers throughout the centuries. Countless wrinkles and furrows are in these faces, which tell so much, even while they conceal so much more.

Of these faces of old Jews, Struck himself, in a letter written to Jewish children of this city shortly before his return here, said:

"You see in these pictures old Jews who gaze sorrowfully into the distance. They are men whom life has used

harshly, and who have had to suffer much for the sake of their faith. Yet in spite of all the injuries inflicted upon them, in spite of the obstacles put in their path, they have remained loyal to the ancient faith of their fathers and willingly borne the yoke of the exile. But you must not believe that all Jews are so sad. A new, young generation is growing up that is striving to gain freedom for these oppressed ones upon their own soil in the land of our fathers. I love all children, but it is the Jewish children who lie closest to my heart; and if you like the pictures I have made, that pleases me more than anything else possibly could."

Struck's portraits comprise the heads of most of the leading men of his time in Germany—poets, artists, musicians, scholars, statesmen—portraits of Haeckle, Dehmel, Geijerstam, and notably his portrait of Gerhart Hauptmann, bespeaking in its multitude of wrinkles and folds and jagged furrows a torrent of pulsing life and deep, consuming thought.

Remarkable amid the richness and variety of Struck's work, however, is the fact that he has never drawn anything merry or jovial. He himself is a serious-minded man, and the note of humor is completely lacking in his work. His nearest approach to a lighter note, perhaps, is in one of his studies for an etching, and even that is entitled "Chanson Triste." He lacks, also, a certain piquanterie. The lack of this quality may be found also in Rembrandt himself. At the same time, Struck lacks what modern Berliners usually possess in too large a measure—a certain appreciation of small, witty points, and he knows not the irony that does not stop short even of self-mockery, such as Heine possessed and showed throughout his works in such bitter abundance.

Even Mr. Struck's brief sojourn in this country last year was productive of a goodly crop of impressionistic etchings and lithographs of American scenes. It is the artist's intention in his present tour of the country from coast to coast to gather together material for a more extensive and representative American cycle, however. His present collection of American sketches includes etchings of the Statue of Liberty, as seen by him for the first time on his initial trip up the bay early in the morning; some forty lithographs, including pictures of Longfellow's cottage at Cambridge, roofs of houses in Chicago, Wanamaker's Building in Philadelphia, the Capitol at Washington, the White House, Niagara and the factories there, society in boxes at the Metropolitan Opera House, opium smokers, scenes from the elevated railway, and scenes in Central Park. In this collection, too, are many

pictures of the Hudson, caught for the most part as he flashed past the scenes, and sketched on a fast-moving train—snapshots in stone, so to speak—brief but remarkably vivid impressions, all of them.

Originally a member of the secessionist movement in German painting, and at present a leader in the Berlin section of this movement, Struck has probably been preserved through the influence of the Dutch painter Israels from the extremes of this faction. His work in color or in black and white shows none of the puerile mannerism of the secessionists at their worst; he inflicts no glaring contrasts of garish colors; his brush and needle leave no purposed effects of a careless impressionism. For him, secessionism is simply a freedom from convention, the liberty of each individual to express himself as an individual in his work.

Mr. Struck contemplates remaining in this country until the middle of April, devoting part of the time to the trip across the continent. For the rest, he will divide his time between the skyscrapers and various men and women for whom sittings for portraits have been arranged.