

Leon Battista Alberti, *De re aedificatoria*, 1450,
Translated as *The Ten Books of Architecture*, 1755.

THE PREFACE.

Our Ancestors have left us many and various Arts tending to the Pleasure and Conveniency of Life, acquired with the greatest Industry and Diligence: Which Arts, though they all pretend, with a Kind of Emulation, to have in View the great End of being serviceable to Mankind; yet we know that each of them in particular has something in it that seems to promise a distinct and separate Fruit: Some Arts we follow for Necessity, some we approve for their Usefulness, and some we esteem because they lead us to the Knowledge of Things that are delightful. What these Arts are, it is not necessary for me to enumerate; for they are obvious. But if you take a View of the whole Circle of Arts, you shall hardly find one but what, despising all others, regards and seeks only its own particular Ends: Or if you do meet with any of such a Nature that you can in no wise do without it, and which yet brings along with it Profit at the same Time, conjoined with Pleasure and Honour, you will, I believe, be convinced, that Architecture is not to be excluded from that Number. For it is certain, if you examine the Matter carefully, it is inexpressibly delightful, and of the greatest Convenience to Mankind in all Respects, both publick and private; and in Dignity not inferior to the most excellent. But before I proceed further, it will not be improper to explain what he is that I allow to be an Architect: For it is not a Carpenter or a Joiner that I thus rank with the greatest Masters in other Sciences; the manual Operator being no more than an Instrument to the Architect. Him I call an Architect, who, by sure and wonderful Art and Method, is able, both with Thought and Invention, to devise, and, with Execution, to compleat all those Works, which, by means of the Movement of great Weights, and the Conjunction and Amassment of Bodies, can, with the greatest Beauty, be adapted to the Uses of Mankind: And to be able to do this, he must have a thorough Insight into the noblest and most curious Sciences. Such must be the Architect. But to return.

Some have been of Opinion, that either Water or Fire were the principal Occasions of bringing Men together into Societies; but to us, who consider the Usefulness and Necessity of Coverings and Walls, it seems evident, that they were the chief Causes of assembling Men together. But the only Obligation we have to the Architect is not for his providing us with safe and pleasant Places, where we may shelter ourselves from the Heat of the Sun, from Cold and Tempest, (though this is no small Benefit); but for having besides contrived many other Things, both of a private and publick Nature of the highest Use and Convenience to the Life of Man. How many noble Families, reduced by the Calamity of the Times, had been utterly lost, both in our own native City, and in others, had not their paternal Habitations preserved and cherished them, as it were, in the Bosom of their Forefathers.

Dædalus in his Time was greatly esteemed for having made the Selinuntians a Vault, which gathered so warm and kindly a Vapour, as provoked a plentiful Sweat, and thereby cured their Distempers with great Ease and Pleasure. Why need I mention others who have contrived many Things of the like Sort conducive to Health; as Places for Exercise, for Swimming, Baths and the like? Or why should I instance in Vehicles, Mills, Time-measures, and other such minute Things, which nevertheless are of great Use in Life? Why should I insist upon the great Plenty of Waters brought from the most remote and hidden Places, and employed to so many different and useful Purposes? Upon Trophies, Tabernacles, sacred Edifices, Churches and the like, adapted to divine Worship, and the Service of Posterity? Or lastly, why should I mention the Rocks cut, Mountains bored through, Vallies filled up, Lakes

confined, Marshes discharged into the Sea, Ships built, Rivers turned, their Mouths cleared, Bridges laid over them, Harbours formed, not only serving to Men's immediate Conveniencies, but also opening them a Way to all Parts of the World; whereby Men have been enabled mutually to furnish one another with Provisions, Spices, Gems, and to communicate their Knowledge, and whatever else is healthful or pleasurable. Add to these the Engines and Machines of War, Fortresses, and the like Inventions necessary to the Defending the Liberty of our Country, Maintaining the Honour, and Encreasing the Greatness of a City, and to the Acquisition and Establishment of an Empire. I am really persuaded, that if we were to enquire of all the Cities which, within the Memory of Man, have fallen by Siege into the Power of new Masters, who it was that subjected and overcame them, they would tell you, the Architect; and that they were strong enough to have despised the armed Enemy, but not to withstand the Shocks of the Engines, the Violence of the Machines, and the Force of the other Instruments of War, with which the Architect distressed, demolished and ruined them. And the Besieged, on the contrary, would inform you, that their greatest Defence lay in the Art and Assistance of the Architect. And if you were to examine into the Expeditions that have been undertaken, you would go near to find that most of the Victories were gained more by the Art and Skill of the Architects, than by the Conduct or Fortune of the Generals; and that the Enemy was oftener overcome and conquered by the Architect's Wit, without the Captain's Arms, than by the Captain's Arms without the Architect's Wit: And what is of great Consequence is, that the Architect conquers with a small Number of Men, and without the Loss of Troops. Let this suffice as to the Usefulness of this Art.

BUT how much the Study and Subject of Building delights, and how firmly it is rooted in the Mind of Man, appears from several Instances, and particularly from this; that you shall find no body who has the Means but what has an Inclination to be building something: And if a Man has happened to think of any Thing new in Architecture, he is fond of communicating and divulging it for the Use of others, as if constrained thereto by Nature. And how often does it fall out, that even when we are employed upon other Things, we cannot keep our Thoughts and Imaginations, from Projecting some Edifice? And when we see other Men's Houses, we immediately set about a careful Examination of all the Proportions and Dimensions, and, to the best of our Ability, consider what might be added, retrenched or altered; and presently give our Opinions how it might be made more compleat or beautiful. And if a Building be well laid out, and justly finished, who is he that does not view it with the utmost Pleasure and Delight? But why need I mention not only how much Benefit and Delight, but how much Glory to Architecture has brought to Nations, which have cultivated it both at home and abroad? Who that has built any publick Edifice does not think himself honoured by it, when it is reputable to a Man only to have built a handsome Habitation for himself? Men of publick Spirits approve and rejoice when you have raised a fine Wall or Portico, and adorned it with Portals, Columns, and a handsome Roof, knowing you have thereby not only served yourself, but them too, having by this generous Use of your Wealth, gained an Addition of great Honour to yourself, your Family, your Descendants, and your City. The Sepulchre of Jupiter was the first Step to the ennobling the Island of Crete; and Delos was not so much respected for the Oracle of Apollo, as for the beautiful Structure of the City, and the Majesty of the Temple. How much Authority accrued to the Roman Name and Empire from their Buildings, I shall dwell upon no further, than that the Sepulchres and other Remains of the ancient Magnificence, everywhere to be found, are a great Inducement and Argument with us for believing many Things related by Historians, which might otherwise have seemed incredible.

Thucydides extremely commends the Prudence of some Ancients, who had so adorned their City with all Sorts of fine Structures, that their Power thereby appeared to be much greater than it really was. And what potent or wise Prince can be named, that among his chief Projects for eternizing his Name and Posterity, did not make Use of Architecture. But of this enough. The Conclusion is, that for the Service, Security, Honour and Ornament of the

Publick, we are exceedingly obliged to the Architect; to whom, in Time of Leisure, we are indebted for Tranquility, Pleasure and Health, in Time of Business for Assistance and Profit; and in both, for Security and Dignity. Let us not therefore deny that he ought to be praised and esteemed, and to be allowed a Place, both for the wonderful and ravishing Beauty of his Works, and for the Necessity, Serviceableness, and Strength of the Things which he has invented, among the Chief of those who have deserved Honour and Rewards from Mankind. The Consideration of these Things induced me, for my Diversion, to look a little further into this Art and its Operations, from what Principles it was derived, and of what Parts it consisted: And finding them of various Kinds, in Number almost infinite, in their Nature marvellous, of Use incredible, insomuch that it was doubtful what Condition of Men, or what Part of the Commonwealth, or what Degree in the City, whether the Publick or Private, Things sacred or profane, Repose or Labour, the Individual or the whole human Species, was most obliged to the Architect, or rather Inventor of all Conveniencies; I resolved, for several Reasons, too tedious here to repeat, to collect all those Things which are contained in these Ten Books. In treating of which, we shall observe this Method: We consider that an Edifice is a Kind of Body consisting, like all other Bodies, of Design and of Matter; the first is produced by the Thought, the other by Nature; so that the one is to be provided by the Application and Contrivance of the Mind, and the other by due Preparation and Choice. And we further reflected, that neither the one nor the other of itself was sufficient, without the Hand of an experienced Artificer, that knew how to form his Materials after a just Design. And the Use of Edifices being various, it was necessary to enquire whether one and the same Kind of Design was fit for all Sorts of Buildings; upon which Account we have distinguished the several Kinds of Buildings: Wherein perceiving that the main Point was the just Composition and Relation of the Lines among themselves, from whence arises the Height of Beauty, I therefore began to examine what Beauty really was, and what Sort of Beauty was proper to each Edifice. And as we often meet with Faults in all these Respects, I considered how they might be altered or amended. Every Book therefore has its Title prefixed to it, according to the Variety of the Subject: The First treats of Designs; the Second, of Materials; the Third, of the Work; the Fourth, of Works in general; the Fifth, of Works in particular; the Sixth, of Ornaments in general; the Seventh, of the Ornaments proper for sacred Edifices; the Eighth, of those for publick and profane ones; The Ninth, of those for the Houses of private Persons; the Tenth, of Amendments and Alterations in Buildings: To which is added, a various History of Waters, and how they are found, and what Use is to be made of the Architect in all these Works: As also Four other Books, Three of which treat of the Art of Painting; and the Fourth, of Sculpture.