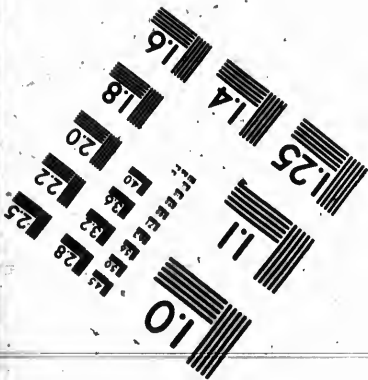
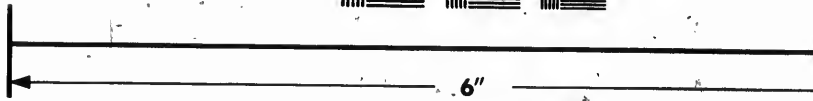
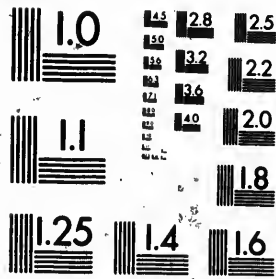


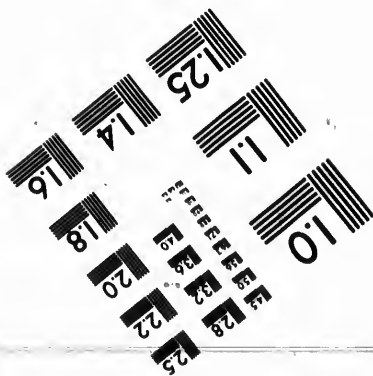
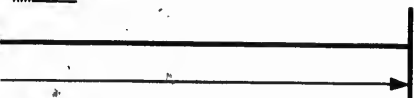
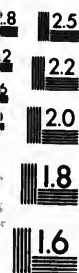
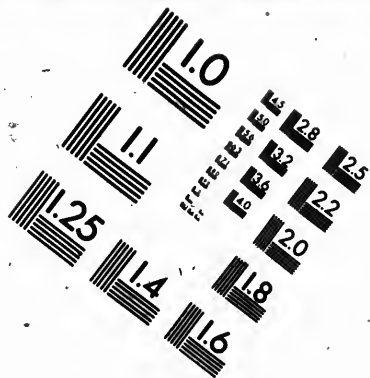
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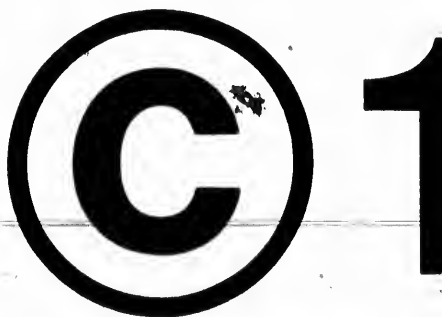
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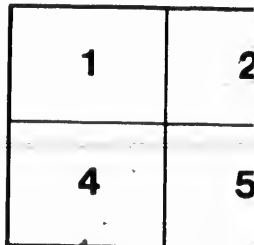
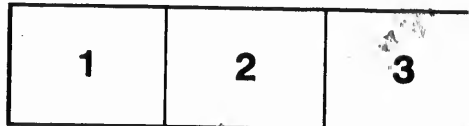
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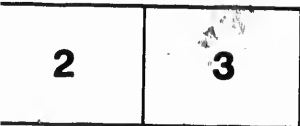
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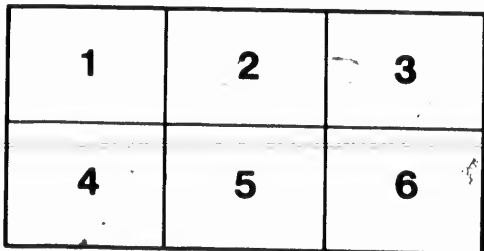
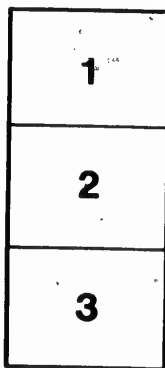
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LECTURE

ON

CHRISTIAN ARCHITECTURE,

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE HALIFAX CATHOLIC INSTITUTE,

BY THE

REV. JOSEPH P. ROLES,

ON WEDNESDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 9TH, 1859.

~~~~~  
Nisi Dominus edificaverit domum in vanum laboraverunt qui edificant  
eam.—PSALM XII. 6.

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## CHRISTIAN ARCHITECTURE.

MR. PRESIDENT,—

The CATHOLIC INSTITUTE of this City was formed in the hope of exciting and satisfying among the young men of our communion, a taste for information on spiritual, and secular subjects. Popular literature is so anti-Catholic,—prejudice is so flattered by perversions of facts and doctrines, that very few of the channels by which knowledge is brought to young minds, are left unfainted. Authors to live, will misrepresent, if not misunderstand. To provide sources, at which the thirst for knowledge may be slaked, without danger, is our religious, and I hope successful undertaking.

There is a subject on which prejudice until lately was strong. It is that of the state of the Middle Ages. They in the eyes of nearly all writers in the English language, were those dark days during which vice and ignorance reigned. It was a sufficient proof of the absurdity of any doctrine, of the futility of any invention to have existed at any period between the days of the Reformation, and the inundation of Europe by the barbarians. Mediæval in our language, almost meant absurd; and if later investigations, had not been conducted with more learning, and less prejudice, than characterized many of the writers of the last century, the world would have been imposed upon by the Chinese charge of barbarism made against days and men, whose characters our age had not understood. But the reaction has taken place. The "dark ages" are now called the ages of faith, not only by members of the Church, but by men whose eyes prejudice could not bandage. To add to the impulse of truth, to unburden the "lazy monks" of some of the obloquy incessantly cast upon them, is a task fit to occupy the leisure of a Priest, and worthy of the attention of a "Catholic Institute." For the charge against the

Middle Ages is not founded on vanity alone, its chief aim, is to asperse the creed universal then, and to attribute to it evils imaginary, since no real ones of sufficient weight can be found.

I do not wish to disparage our century, so that you may form a higher opinion of the past. I believe, in many things, we have fallen upon happier days. But has our progress been other than material? Has man become better or worse? Or can we assert, that the advance that we have made in material progress, is not counterbalanced by our retrogression in the esthetic. We have cultivated the arts and sciences in reference to the wants of the body with great success, but we have not been so careful of the wants of the soul.

In the vast contrast I suggest between the advantages of the present and Middle Ages, I limit myself to one question—I would pluck only one twig from the bundle of prejudice, by giving some notion of the rise, progress, and decline of Gothic or "Christian Architecture," leaving you to decide if a period which had attained such excellence in one art, could have been so ignorant and vicious as detractors assert.

The believer in the gross ignorance of the Monks of the Middle Ages, should read the researches of Antiquarians and Architects into the peculiarities of the Gothic Monasteries and Abbeys. The *Scriptorium* is according to popular prejudice a place of very little utility. But that it was the scene of much active and intelligent labor, we discover in the numerous copies of Christian and Pagan literature, in the illuminated Missals and Psalters, in the preservation and innumerable repetitions of the words of sacred Scripture, and in the ponderous tomes of scholastic learning. The architectural arrangements of conventual buildings were in accordance with the necessities of a community bound together by vows and aims peculiar to Christian monks. The chapel was first in prominence and beauty, around which clustered the walls of the other buildings. The cloister, the place of recreation during some hours—meditation during others. The monks at work at the walls of Abbeys are strange types of indolence. The Venerable Bede delivering as his last words to his amanuensis, his commentary on the Psalms, not an unfavorable symbol of the ignorance of the monastic order.

D'Israeli thinks that the "beautiful is dead." He excepts Music, in which he recognizes still some life. According to his decision, we can no longer create, nor appreciate any thing sublime. Pugin has attempted to corroborate the assertion of our Chancellor of the Exchequer as far as Architecture is concerned, by a comparison between the structures of the nineteenth, and those of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and is convinced that the *feelings* are wanting in our architects to attain the excellence exhibited in the works of the "old designers,"

"Yes, it was the faith, zeal, and above all, the unity of our ancestors that enabled them to conceive, and raise those wonderful fabrics that still remain to excite our wonder and admiration."\*

In the first ages of the Church, subject to the persecutions of the Pagan Emperors, all public worship was impossible. In the crypts and catacombs, were the divine mysteries celebrated with any freedom. The rough altars were the tombs of the martyrs. Their relics are not absent from our altars even in our day. And the lights now burned during the Holy Sacrifice, or carried by our ecclesiastics in procession, were then not only used as types, but the necessities of the places into which persecution had driven the followers of Christ. But when peace was restored, and when Paganism receded before the light of the cross, the Forums, and other public buildings, (*Basilicas*), given by the authorities to the Christian priesthood, served as Churches, and even perpetuated the name of Basilica, in those erected afterwards, and influenced their form and arrangements. In the Church of S. Clement at Rome, we have a palpable *souvenir* of that period, of transition from persecution under the Empire to toleration, when Christianity was no longer obliged to conceal the sublimity of her rites; and her creed and her morality, were about to complete over Paganism the victory commenced by miracles and sufferings.

Under Constantine the Byzantine style of Architecture came into vogue, arising out of the modifications introduced by Christians into the form of the Basilica. Transepts were constructed so that with the nave they might form the ground plan in the shape of a cross. S. Sophia in Constantinople is a type of the

\* Pugin.

Byzantine order. It was a fusion of Greek, Latin and Oriental styles, into which Christianity had thrown some elements.

But at length came the inundation of the Barbarians—men without any of the arts appertaining to civilization. After the first fit of destruction had passed away, and the natural desire to build actuated them, they satisfied it in absurd imitations of the Roman and Greek buildings they had spared or ruined. Yet prior to the thirteenth century, the influence of pilgrimages to the East must have made an impression on the minds of the Clergy and Monks, as we can trace in the buildings they have erected faint copies of the beauties of the Oriental and Byzantine styles. We distinguish three periods in the Byzantine order, 1st, from its introduction in the fifth century until the eleventh; 2nd, from the eleventh until the twelfth, and lastly, from the beginning until the end of the twelfth century.

The twelfth century is an important era in the history of Europe. The long connection and struggle between the Empire and the Priesthood is brought to a close. Peter the Hermit, and his assistants have stirred up among the knights of Christendom an enthusiasm, the influence of which is not confined to the campaigns in the Holy Land. For to the long pilgrimages and sojourns of Clerks and Knights in the East is attributable the impulse remarkable in the Architecture of the thirteenth century. Then the Ogival or Gothic Arch appears; and other peculiarities give to the buildings of this period a character which distinguishes them entirely from those which preceded; and "it would seem that the immense movement of souls represented by S. Dominick, S. Francis and S. Lewis could have no other expression than in those gigantic Cathedrals which would appear to carry up to Heaven, on the tops of their spires and towers, the universal homage of the love and faith of Christians. The vast Basilicas of the preceding centuries appeared to them, too heavy, too naked, too empty for the new emotions of their piety and love, and the fervor of their faith. In the Architecture of the thirteenth century, instead of spreading out vast roofs to shelter the faithful, every thing darts upwards. The horizontal line disappears gradually, the tendency upwards has blotted it out."

\* Montalembert.

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The peculiarities of the Gothic Architecture are due to the influences of Christianity—faith grafting on the prevailing styles, its impress. The Crusaders too, who had survived their combats in the East, with the pardonable pride of travellers added the information they had obtained. The round arch became pointed, in imitation of the arches found in Saracenic erections, and the fan tracery and sculpturing of the 13th century, were the reproductions—under Christian hands—of the Arabesques. The assertion that it was to the Crusaders we owe the introduction of the pointed arch is sustained by the facts that it existed in the Moorish possessions at the period of the Crusades—is still found in Mosques in Syria and India, whose erection dates from a period anterior to the 12th century—is noticed simultaneously with the return of the Crusades,—and buildings begun in the ordinary style of the time, have been finished with the peculiarities of the Gothic, in a manner too abrupt to admit of the probability of a gradual transition from one style to another.

The thirteenth century was favorable to the triumph of a Christian order of Architecture. It was an age of self-denial and faith—its spirit manifested itself in the enduring monuments which it has bestowed on the world. The Catholic Church relying on the promise of her divine founder, would build no temporary shelter for her children; “it was this pious feeling that induced the ecclesiastics of old to devote their revenues to this pious purpose, and to labor with their own hands in the accomplishment of the work.”\*

Beauty in Architecture like in every thing else, is the proportion of its parts. A gentleman's residence should not have the warlike look of a Norman castle, nor a church appear like a shop. Neither can we approve the taste which decorates Protestant Churches with types of mysteries and doctrines in which those who worship within do not believe. There is no proportion of parts between altars without sacrifices, trefoil windows in Unitarian Churches, and crosses on the buttresses of Presbyterian chapels. Gothic Architecture is Catholic, and “disguise it as you will,” it is

\* Pugin.

"a bitter draught." It comes down with too many recollections of Bishops, Priests and Monks,—with dreams of censers smoking, lights burning, and a form of worship too old to easily coincide with the modern forms of prayer in which faith is congealed. The Beauty of the Gothic Architecture, is in the expression of heavenly hope, and faith it symbolizes—in its perfect application to the rites of those who built, and the devotion that it excited, and fostered in the hearts of those who sought spiritual aid in the house of prayer.

In the thirteenth century Christian Architecture has freed itself from the trammels of the rounded arch. Strength is not the only aim of those who build—without detracting from it, elegance and harmony are superadded. Religion speaks in the very walls, the "Stones of Rome arise," and preach the old "Sursum corda." In all the countries from which the crusaders had gone forth, the same emulation is visible in different forms, and those who had given up their lives for the defence of Christ's Sepulchre, refused not their means to decorate their temple in which he continually resides. The peculiarities of the architecture of this period were chiefly in the pointed arch, (preferable to the Roman in elegance and strength,) in the enlargement of the nave, and in the occasional construction of side aisles, which were prolonged in a semicircle round the choir. Side chapels, dedicated to different Saints were superadded to the prolongation of the aisles, and at their juncton, an extension was made and arranged as "Our Lady's" chapel. The ground plan, is of course cruciform. The ceiling is decorated with fan tracery;—or the oak rafters carved with much taste and skill, serve as ornament and support to the roof. The columns to afford an appearance of lightness are clustered, and the capitals encircled with vine or oak leaves, in grace or in propriety surpass the meaningless figures and leaves of the Ionic or Corinthian. Trefoil and lancet windows are introduced, and Westminster Abbey presents the first specimen of the latter contribution to Gothic taste. But round the chief entrance were the labors of the architect and artist expended. The front usually has three entrances, which correspond to the nave and aisles. Statues, symbols, figures carved with quaint grace, would suggest a devotional spirit to those about

to enter. The largest entrance is divided by a column usually sustaining a statue. This disposition symbolizes the two roads which man may choose—that of virtue or sin. And to further impress the necessity of a proper choice, the last judgment is carved round the portal. The *facade* is flanked by two towers of equal or unequal dimensions, and in the 13th century—their lightness and height become remarkable. Every accessory to an architectural style was undergoing some modification. Cornices, buttresses, roses, windows, are finished in a manner becoming the rest of the building, and all contain some lesson. In their symmetry, some mystery or doctrine is silently inculcated.

But this century is celebrated for the perfection attained by sculptors. The stiffness discernible in the statues of the 12th century has faded away into a graceful expression. The attitudes are easy, and a sentiment of religion breathes through the works of the artists. In every way we must consider this period as the epoch when Christian Architecture attained its excellence. It exhibited more harmony, greater elevation, and severity than at later periods. Christian symbolism attained its height; simplicity of design had not yet been disguised by excess of ornamentation, and the use of stained glass on the windows assisted in preserving "Religious twilight," and deepening that respect for the temple which the Catholic Church has always taught.

Devotion loves not the "garish light." To diminish the inconvenient glare, to invest the church with a gloom favorable to sublime and pious reflections, and to instruct, were the aims which guided the artists who worked in glass. The Romans may have invented the art. The Italians may have preserved it, but to the monks of the Gothic period, its perfection cannot but be attributed. And with all the mechanical skill we have acquired, and with our very enlarged experience of chemical operations, we can produce nothing to compete with their success. If the difficulties in glass staining and painting be well known and considered by us, we could form some conception of the skill, patience and means expended even on minor details of the ecclesiastical buildings. Near the end of the fifteenth century, the perfection of



the mechanical process of glass staining detracted somewhat from the general effect. The same declension is seen as in the architecture itself. The colors are admirably given; the design chaste and graceful, yet the result at some distance, where the beauty of detail is not appreciable is less striking and quaint than in windows on which not so much skill in the workmanship had been expended, but where the *ensemble* had been more held in consideration.

The interior arrangements of the Gothic Church correspond to our creed. The Altar where the Holy Sacrifice is offered is the most conspicuous and most ornamented spot within. The reredos carved, jewelled, and decorated with statues, carries the attention there. The chancel rail separates the Clergy from the Laity, and the Baptisterium at the entrance teaches that baptism is the door by which we enter the fold of Christ.

But why all those types, carvings, and figures? Better to have them sold and given to the poor, re-echoes this modern age. to the voice of the purse keeper of old; forgetting that printing has opened to us a source of information to which those who lived in the middle ages could not resort. Bibles then were not procurable by even the wealthy. A whole life-time was occupied in transcribing one copy, the purchase of which was a matter of greater importance than that of an estate. To teach faith and impress it by the senses was the task of the Clergy who built the monuments of the thirteenth century, and if we have been relieved by modern invention from some of the sad necessity which they overcame, we have no reason to find fault with the means they adopted, because chance has favored us with better. And is not the wish to receive instruction through symbols and types natural? Did not the Saviour of Man Himself adopt that mode of teaching and touching hearts? Shall any one who reads with respect the story of the cure of the blind man in the Gospel sneer at the trefoil type, the rose of our "Lady's Chapel," the fish (ixthus) of the catacombs, and those numerous types which antiquity and piety consecrate.

From some of the names of the monuments erected during the thirteenth century, we may estimate its architectural excellence

and the enormous outlay and skill expended. Salisbury Cathedral, York Minster, and Westminster Abbey, are the most conspicuous buildings of the period in England. In France the Church dedicated to "Notre Dame" at Paris, the Cathedrals of Amiens and Strasbourg, and those of Burgos and Toledo, in Spain, were begun and most of them completed at the same time. The masons joined in secret confraternities, passed from city to city, and transmitted orally the knowledge of their trade to those who replaced or succeeded them; and the monks—the architects—were sent from one part of Europe to another to assist and direct the construction of any edifice undertaken by their order. The means for carrying on the works were provided from the resources with which piety had endowed the Churches and monasteries, and by the donations of the faithful. Even Princes and grandees did not think themselves degraded by personally assisting in the labor. In the Masonic confraternities, banded for the construction of Mediæval buildings, we perceive the germs of those Societies, which, swerving from the purpose and faith of their first institutions, have since come under the ban of the Church. Their declension though was gradual, and it was not until long afterwards on the Rhine any opposition and improper secrecy were observed. Many ancient chronicles speak highly of the fervor, generosity, and energy of the members of those Confraternities. Of their skill the proofs are more visible. The names of the architects have never reached us. Sunk in the obscurity of religious life, they worked and designed only for the knowledge of Him who rewards in secret. The monastic vow blots out individualism, and is the only approach to the common fusion of love, hope, thoughts, faith and genius, after which the Socialists have sighed in vain.

But one English name comes down through all the secrecy under which clerical architects wished to conceal themselves—the name of William of Wykeham. As a bishop, as Lord High Chancellor, and as a protector of science, he is little known in comparison with the reputation he has acquired as architect of many of the monuments erected in England during the thirteenth century, and as the generous founder of the institutions he planned and perfected.

Oxford, in the college he founded, still is grateful for his efforts, and nourishes among her students respect for his memory, and when an august personage some few years past, came from beneath the roof of Windsor Castle to utter his hope and conviction that England had an insuperable objection to a celibate clergy, surely some recollection of the Bishop of Winchester must have flitted before his mind. That one of the order he depreciated by the expression had been the architect of Windsor Castle, should have been a delicate reason to suppress a sentiment not so true as popular and rather unjust to those to whom they who lived in mediæval palaces and abbeys, owe not a little.

The fourteenth century expanded the resources of the thirteenth. There may be some graceful additions, but no radical change in the style. The mullions are more ornamented and curved from the middle. The unusual amount of decoration perceptible round the windows seems to date from the introduction of hood mouldings, and in the wish to fill up the space between them and the window. The rose, too, in the transepts, and occasionally in the *facade*, is much more common at least in England than in the thirteenth century. But the success which attended the efforts to perfect glass staining renders the Ecclesiastical building of the fourteenth century remarkable. Whatever antiquity may be admitted to the art, the deepening of the shades, the correctness of the design, the ease of the drapery, reached their perfection at this period.

A singular species of symbolism dates from this time. The fact that the Church typifies Heaven, led the artist to look upon the external walls as the abode of the fallen spirits, and to plant upon the buttresses or cornices grotesque figures and faces, representing devils, under whose traits malice had an opportunity of perpetuating the image of an enemy. Satire of an anti-clerical kind frequently then wrote in stone. But apart from this species, there is less symbolism than in the thirteenth century, and the sculptor's chisel is more occupied, on subjects of a traditional, or Biblical nature. The life of the Gothic Architecture near the end of the fourteenth is passing away. It is becoming too florid, and is less full of its first inspirations.

During the fifteenth century the decline has come. Extremes meet. The beauties of the thirteenth culminated in the fourteenth century. The fifteenth with its caprices, and introductions of novelties will bring the style into disrepute.

A profound reader of history asserts that three centuries form the duration of the existence of anything which is not in itself divine. Dynasties, heresies, modes, all crumble away. Man's energy may produce effects after his death—may stimulate his followers, force them to carry on, or perfect the work which the brevity of life refused him permission to do. But the decay of time overtakes all, and three centuries are as much as it can permit human institutions. The Gothic Architecture did not longer resist the influence of the destroyer. But the decline was gradual, religious enthusiasm did not die out at once—the artists had not lost their taste and skill, but the sentiment of piety which first sanctified and adorned the efforts had fled. Besides, the fervor of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries had so well provided for the congregations and communities which used the churches, that designers were too frequently occupied in repairing and ornamenting what their ancestors had built, and thus became too habituated to dispute superiority in the execution of details.

I have divided the history of the Gothic Architecture into three centuries. Of course you are aware that the same progress was not made every where during the same time. Nor are the peculiarities I have marked out as belonging to certain periods, not found elsewhere, in buildings of later or earlier dates. But I have said enough to divest you of any prejudice against those centuries on charges of the stolid ignorance which fall from the lips of those whose reading is too shallow to appreciate things and days, considered dark, because they are profound.

But with the Reformation comes a new order of Iconoclasts. Men who loved not the glory of God's house, who are scandalized at anything beautiful, whose pious acts are in mutilating statues and breaking stained glass.—in their eyes celibacy is sinful, decorum in rites pride, and veneration to saints and holy things idolatry. Men too, who love not persecution for righteousness sake, and who carry from one end of Europe off to the other, the

turmoil of religious strife. Sudden termination to the works of Gothic designers and workmen, Monasteries and convents, are coveted by and become the properties of laymen. In England the satellites of kings receive their reward in conventual buildings and lands. In Germany, and other places the people divide the spoils. In France, the wars of the Huguenots and the League find other occupations for the monks save building. In nearly all the countries in which the Ogival style prevailed, a commotion not soon to be forgotten in history, renders architectural deeds impossible.

But if the efforts of the first Reformers did not fortunately arrest the progress of civilization, it turned its course in another direction. The style of architecture consecrated in the Roman and Grecian temples to false divinities was the one selected for the buildings of the new era. The writings of Vitruvius and the works of the Italian artists instituted a new order of the *Renaissance* as a substitute for the Christian order, that had died out. Nevertheless, the Gothic still influenced somewhat. But as it gradually sunk into disrepute, a vile spirit of imitation of Grecian and Roman monuments took its place. As the nations abandoned the faith, they declined in the cultivation of those arts which it fostered.

Let us glance at the extent of Europe over which the Gothic was in vogue. To wherever the Crusaders returned (except Italy) there the Gothic prevailed. In England its monuments are numerous and extensive. The comparative peace which the English enjoyed—the riches which they possessed, and the generosity of their Kings, enabled them to obey the religious impulse with more freedom than was afforded the inhabitants of other countries. The fury of the Vandals under Henry VIII. and Edward VI. and of the Puritans during the Commonwealth, confined their attacks to windows, altars, statues, &c., and spared the buildings. Scotland's kirks and abbeys bear evidence to her energy and former faith, and all Cromwell's destructive forces in Ireland could not obliterate the marks of the structures which adorned the "Island of Saints." In the northern parts of France, the Gothic monuments are very numerous. The material is of a better kind, and

is more susceptible of carving and preserves its color longer than the stone used in Great Britain; and the injuries inflicted by the wars of the Huguenots, and the rage of the first Revolution have been repaired by a nation whose taste is seldom at fault. In Germany the Gothic was successfully studied and acted upon. The Cathedral of Cologne is perhaps the finest specimen of the art, although the Spaniard claims for Burgos superiority.

In Italy alone, Gothic architecture made no progress. We may find the reasons in the climate and clear atmosphere—the latter acts as a better back ground, to large massive buildings, than to the lofty pinnacles and irregular formation of the mediæval piles. Besides the Italian pride, naturally selected those orders indigenuous to its soil, and would not prefer ultramontane novelties to the old rules sanctified by time. Milan Cathedral is in the Gothic order, but its designers and builders were probably French.

Shall I speak of the *Renaissance* of Christian Architecture— that movement in our age so different from that in which the Gothic obtained its eminence? Scarcely a Church has been built lately without imitating the peculiarities of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Pugin and his disciples in Ecclesiastical structures, and Barry and his, in civil buildings, would fain bring again to our minds the recollections of the “wondrous fabrics”— of the past, and piscina, reredos, and chancel, have become household words in the language of persons who disbelieve the articles of faith with which these things were in connection. But one or two men cannot struggle against their time. To build well and to build cheaply, are not compatible aims. However we may respect, it is to be regretted we are not able to imitate, with any approach to the beauty of the model. Yet one man on our continent has not lost faith in Catholic energy, skill and generosity. The Archbishop of New York is emulous of the fame of William of Wykeham, and in the midst of the commercial and worldly population of the great city, over whose church he rules, purposes to raise a Cathedral fit to vie in size, beauty and decoration, with any of those of which France is so justly proud. He has a great problem to solve.

Thus briefly have I presented to the members of our institute,

my inducements to study "Christian Architecture." I have repeated the remark that "the beautiful is dead," yet round the ruins of the Gothic still lingers that antique beauty, which the fingers of decay have in a peculiar manner heightened, and in the copies of the old Cathedrals and Abbeys which our modern architects construct, we still hope Catholic Architecture shall live again—that the Church shall renew its youth like an eagle. To Pugin and his disciples, is due the opening of a new path to Christ's-fold in the appreciation of the monuments of mediæval times.

Is there any one here, born in the British Isles, whom the recollections of the ivy-clad ruins of his native land have not saddened and influenced, and who has not regretted the loss of that pleasure of which his exile deprived him, communings with the past near the graves of clerks and knights beneath the toppling walls of monastery or abbey? Who will deny that such recollections have largely influenced the destinies of our race? Scott labored to build his Abbotsford, to re-echo the name of the old ruin which decorated his estate. And in his Indian campaigns and struggles, Warren Hastings was always sustained by the hope that his success would enable him to resume the possession of the Abbey and acres his ancestors had not been able to retain. "The old Abbey which may be mine no more," writes Byron. Does not every Catholic sympathize with the grief of the poet? Oh! those old Abbeys, minsters, monasteries, and convents, are ours no more. Their altars are overthrown,—their niches are statueless—their clergy and tenants do not appreciate "the glories we have lost."

But shall we despair? Are there not signs of hope held out to us? Shall we not like Hastings, struggle in the expectation of that day, when we shall re-enter into the possession of our own, and when the Mediæval buildings shall be no longer studies for Antiquarians and Architects, or empty shelters for a religion too cold for their shade—but the realities of a rite to which they were dedicated?

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