

Mansfield Milburg Francisco

The Cathedrals of Northern France



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Francis Miltoun
The Cathedrals of Northern France

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

BY THE AUTHOR AND ARTIST

TO THE GENIUS OF RACE WHICH

MADE POSSIBLE THE EXISTENCE OF THESE

ARCHITECTURAL "GLORIES OF FRANCE"

APOLOGIA

"There are two ways of writing a book of travel: to recount the journey itself or the results of it." This is also the case with regard to any work which attempts to purvey topographical or historical information of a nature which is only to be gathered upon the spot; and, when an additional side-light is shown by reason of the inclusion, as in the present instance, of the artistic and religious element, it becomes more and more a question of judicious selection and arrangement of fact, rather than a mere hazarding of opinions, which, in many cases, can be naught but conjecture, and may, in spite of any good claim to authoritativeness, be misunderstood or perverted to an inutile end, or, what is worse, swallowed in that oblivion where lies so much excellent thought, which, lacking either balance or timeliness, has become stranded, wrecked, and practically lost to view because of its unappropriate and unattractive presentation.

To-day, the purely technical writer may have little hope of immortality unless he is broad-minded enough to take a cultivated interest in many matters outside the ken of his own particular sphere. The best-equipped person living could not produce a new "Dictionary of Architecture," and expect it to fill any niche that may be waiting for such a work, unless he brought to bear, in addition to his own special knowledge, something of the statistician, something of the professed compiler, and, if possible, a little of the not unimportant knowledge possessed by the maker and seller of books, meaning – the publisher. Given these qualifications, it is likely that he will then produce an ensemble as far in advance of what otherwise might have been as is the modern printing machine, as a factor in the dissemination of literature, as compared with the ancient scribes working to the same end.

The sentimentalist and rhapsodist in words and ideas is a dwindling factor at the present day, and a new presentation of fact is occasionally to be met with in the printed page. The best "book of travel" within the knowledge of the writer, and perhaps one of the slightest in bulk ever written in the English language, is Stevenson's "Inland Voyage" – here were imagination, appreciation, and a new way of seeing things, and, above all, enthusiasm; and this is the formula upon which doubtless many a future writer will build his reputation, though he may never reach the significant heights expressed by Stevenson in the picturesque wording of his wish to be made Bishop of Noyon.

This apparent digression into a critical estimate of the making of books is but another expression of the justification of the writer in the attempt herein made to set forth in attractive and enduring form certain facts and realities with regard to the grand and glorious group of cathedrals of Northern France.

They have appeared as demanding something more than the conventional guide-book, or even technical estimates as to their perfections, and the belief is that the gathering together, after this fashion, of the contemporary information not always to the hand of the general reader presents an attraction as appealing and deserving of a place on the book-shelf as would be an avowed reference work, or a volume made to sell on the strength of its bulk or ornateness, or, lacking these questionable attributes, presented in the guise of a whilom text-book, the sole province of which is to impart "knowledge" after a certain well recognized and set pattern.

It is believed that, regardless of much that has been said and written anent the subject, the fact remains that some considerable numbers of persons may be supposed to exist who would be glad of a further suggestion which would make possible an acquaintance with the cathedrals of France as a part of their own personal experience. To all such, then, it is to be hoped this book will appeal.

F. M.

INTRODUCTION

An attempt to enumerate the architectural monuments of France is not possible without due consideration being given to the topographical divisions of the country, which, so far as the early population and the expression of their arts and customs is concerned, naturally divides itself into two grand divisions of influences, widely dissimilar.

Historians, generally, agree that the country which embraces the Frankish influences in the north, as distinct from that where are spoken the romance languages, finds its partition somewhere about a line drawn from the mouth of the Loire to the Swiss lakes. Territorially, this approaches an equal division, with the characteristics of architectural forms well nigh as equally divided. Indeed, Fergusson, who in his general estimates and valuations is seldom at fault, thus divides it: – "on a line which follows the valley of the Loire to a point between Tours and Orleans, then southwesterly to Lyons, and thence along the valley of the Rhône to Geneva."

With such a justification, then, it is natural that some arbitrary division should be made in arranging the subject matter of a volume which treats, in part only, of a country or its memorials; even though the influences of one section may not only have lapped over into the other, but, as in certain instances, extended far beyond. As the peoples were divided in speech, so were they in their manner of building, and the most thoroughly consistent and individual types were in the main confined to the environment of their birth. A notable exception is found in Brittany, where is apparent a generous admixture of style which does not occur in the churches of the first rank; referring to the imposing structures of the Isle de France and its immediate vicinity. The "Grand Cathedrals" of this region are, perhaps, most strongly impressed upon the mind of whoever takes something more than a superficial interest in the subject as the type which embodies the loftiest principles of Gothic forms, and, as such, they are perhaps best remembered by that very considerable body of persons known as intelligent observers.

The strongest influences at work in the north from the twelfth century onward have been in favour of the Gothic or pointed styles, whilst, in the south, civic and ecclesiastical architecture alike were of a manifest Byzantine or Romanesque tendency. No better illustration of this is possible than to recall the fact that, when the builders of the fifteenth century undertook to complete that astoundingly impressive choir at Beauvais, they sought to rival in size and magnificence its namesake at Rome, which, under the care of the Pontiff himself, was then being projected. Thus it was that this thoroughly Gothic structure of the north was to stand forth as the indicator of local influences, as contrasted with the Italian design and plans of the St. Peter's of the south.

A discussion of the merits of any territorial claims as to the inception of what is commonly known as Gothic architecture, under which name, for the want of a more familiar term, it shall be referred to herein, is quite apart from the purport of this volume, and, as such, it were best ignored. The statement, however, may be made that it would seem clearly to be the development of a northern influence which first took shape after a definite form in a region safely comprehended as lying within the confines of northeastern France, the Netherlands, and the northern Rhine Provinces. Much has been written on this debatable subject and doubtless will continue to be, either as an arrow shot into the air by some wary pedant, or an equally unconvincing statement, without proof, of some mere follower in the footsteps of an illustrious, but behind the times, expert. It matters not, as a mere detail, whether it was brought from the East in imperfect form by the Crusaders, and only received its development at the hands of some ingenious northerner, or not. Its development was certainly rapid and sure in the great group which we know to-day in northern France, and, if proof were wanted, the existing records in stone ought to be sufficiently convincing to point out the fact that here Mediæval Gothic architecture received its first and most perfect development. The *Primaire*: the development of the style finding its best example at Paris. The

Secondaire: the Perfectionnement at Reims, and its Apogee at Amiens. The *Tertiaire*: practically the beginning of the decadence, in St. Ouen at Rouen, only a shade removed from the debasement which soon followed. As to the merits or demerits of the contemporary structures of other nations, that also would be obviously of comparative unimportance herein except so far as a comparison might once and again be made to accentuate values.

The earliest art triumphs of the French may well be said to have been in the development and *perfectionnement* of Mediæval (Gothic) architecture. Its builders planned amply, wisely, and well, and in spite of the interruptions of wars, of invasions, and of revolutions, there is nowhere to be found upon the earth's surface so many characteristic attributes of Mediæval Gothic architecture as is to be observed in this land, extending from the Romanesque types of Fréjus, Périgueux and Angoulême to that classical degeneration commonly called the Renaissance, a more offensive example of which could hardly be found than in the conglomerate structure of St. Etienne du Mont at Paris, or the more modern and, if possible, even more ugly Cathedral Churches at Arras, Cambrai, or Rennes in the north.

There may be attractive Italian types in existence out of Italy; but the fact is that, unless they are undoubted copies of a thoroughly consistent style to the very end, they impress one as being out of place in a land where the heights of its own native style are so exalted.

Gothic, regardless of the fact as to whether it be the severe and unornamental varieties of the Low Countries or the exaggerations of the most ornately flamboyant style, appears not only to please the casual and average observer, but the thorough student of ecclesiastical architecture as well. It has come to be the accepted form throughout the world of what is best representative of the thought and purpose for which a great church should stand.

With the Renaissance we have not a little to do, when considering the cathedrals of France. Seldom, if ever, in the sixteenth century did the builder or even the restorer add aught but Italian accessories where any considerable work was to be accomplished. Why, or how, the Renaissance ever came into being it is quite impossible for any one to say, *sans doubt*, as is the first rudimentary invention of Gothic itself. Perhaps it was but the outcome of a desire for something different, if not new; but in the process the taste of the people fell to a low degree. Architecture may be said to have been all but divorced from life, and, while the fabric is a dead thing of itself, it is a very living and human expression of the tendencies of an era. The Renaissance sought to revive painting and sculpture and to incorporate them into architectural forms. Whether after a satisfactory manner or not appears to have been no concern with the revivers of a style which was entirely unsuited in its original form to a northern latitude. That which answered for the needs and desires of a southern race could not be boldly transplanted into another environment and live without undergoing an evolution which takes time, a fact not disproven by later events.

The Italians themselves were the undoubted cause of the debasement of the classical style, evidences having crept into that country nearly a hundred years before the least vestiges were known in either France or Germany, the Netherlands, or England, and which, though traceable, had left but slight impress in Spain. It is doubtless not far wrong to attribute its introduction into France as the outcome of the wanderings in Italy of Charles VIII., in the latter years of the XV. century. As a result of this it is popularly supposed that it was introduced into the domestic architecture of the nobles who had accompanied the king. Here it found perhaps its most satisfying expression; in those magnificent chateaux of the Loire, and the neighbourhood of Tours and Blois, ever a subject for sentimental praise. One would not seek to pass condemnation upon the application of revived classic features where they were but the expression of an individual taste, as in a chateau whose owner so chose to build and embellish it. Certainly no more splendid edifices of their kind are known than the magnificent establishments at Blois, Chenonceau, Chambord, or Chaumont. The style appears, however, out of place; an admixture meaningless in itself and in its application when,

with a Gothic foundation bequeathed them, builders sought to incorporate into a cathedral such palpable inconsistencies as was frequently done.

The building of the chateaux was perhaps the first anti-Gothic step in France and proved to be an influence which spread not slowly, as to decorative detail at least, and soon of itself established a decided non-Gothic type.

It was but natural that the cathedral builders should have followed to some extent this new influence. The Church was ever seeking to strengthen its popularity, the bishops ensconced themselves in their cathedral cities as snugly as did a feudal lord in his castle, and their emulation of wealth outside of the Church was but an effort to keep their status on a plane with that of the other power which also demanded allegiance of the people. It is to be regretted that they did not pass this manifestation by, or at least not encumbered an otherwise consistent Gothic fabric with superimposed meaningless detail. Such decorative embellishments as are represented by the tomb of Louis XII. at St. Denis, and the tombs of the cardinals at Rouen, may be considered characteristic, though they bear earlier dates by some twenty years than the south portal of Beauvais, which is thoroughly the best of Gothic, or St. Maclou at Rouen, which, though highly florid, is without a trace of anti-Gothic. The extreme (though not a cathedral church) may be seen at St. Etienne du Mont, wherein the effort is made to incorporate large masses of pseudo-classical decoration with Gothic, and, alas, with sad effect.

For the most part, the Gothic cathedrals of France, as such, while closely related to each other in their design and arrangements, have little to do with those which lie without the confines of the country, either in general features or in detail. The type is distinctively one which stands by its own perfections. In size, while in many instances not having the length of nave of several in England, they have nearly always an equal, if not a greater, width and an almost invariably greater height, though not equal in superficial area to St. Peter's in Italy, the Dom at Cologne, or even the cathedral at Seville in Spain.

Such Romanesque types as are to be seen to the northward of the Loire are mostly found in the smaller churches of Brittany, while the early transition type, so familiar throughout the Netherlands, is, in France, usually seen in the neighbourhood of the frontiers of the Low Countries.

"Les Grandes Cathédrales" of the north are distinctly those of Paris, Amiens, Reims, Rouen, Beauvais, and Chartres; and it is to them that reference must continually be made; while the severely plain transitory types of Noyon or Soissons, or the more effective development of Laon, and the flamboyant structures of Troyes and Nantes, at least lean toward the decadence.

The difficulty of assigning ranks to these monumental cathedrals is made the greater by reason of the fact that to-day it is with but one people that we have to reckon, so far as their temperament and environment is concerned. Since feudal times the movement has ever been toward one nation, one people, and one view, different from that presented in the middle ages.

For centuries after the break of Roman power it had been mostly one local influence against another which prevented perfect cohesion to any national spirit, and thus it was that the tendencies of the cathedral builders, though Roman as to their teaching and religion, and doubtless, in many instances, with regard to their birth as well, followed no special style until the era of Gothic development. Unconsciously, transitory types crept in, until suddenly throughout northern Europe there bloomed forth within less than a century of time the so-called Gothic in all its splendour, and with scarce a century between the commencement and the completion of some of the most notable of the group. The Romanesque types which still lingered in Brittany, though well worthy of special consideration to-day, are unimportant and in a way insignificant when compared with the grand group.

To most of us it will be impossible to conjure up any more significant thought with regard to mediæval church architecture than that fostered by the memories of acquaintanceship with these examples of north France; an opinion which is further strengthened when it is also recalled that

they are representative of the first really national artistic expression. For this reason alone, if for no other, the hasty critics who have so handily claimed precedence elsewhere, might profitably review the facts of the circumstance which led to so universal an adoption of the full-blown style in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The Romanesque peoples were confined southwards of mid-France at the time of the withdrawal of the Roman legions, while, in the north, the conquering Franks sought to wipe out every vestige of their past influence; hence it may be considered that the new manner of building had everything in favour of its speedy growth. It was thus definitely assured of a warm welcome, and, following in the footsteps of Clovis himself, the rulers were more than willing to aid what they believed might be a strengthening influence, politically, as well as morally.

The style may be justly said to be a natural and growthful expression of a race, and more significant than all else is the fact that nowhere, not even on the Rhine, which with northern France claims the origin of the style, is to be found any single example equalling in any like measure the perfections of "Les Grandes Cathédrales Françaises," though it be recalled that in many instances the German buildings were planned and often erected by French architects and artisans.

Among the two thousand or more "Monuments Historiques" paternally cared for by the French government and under the direct control of the Ministry of Public Instruction and the Beaux Arts, none are of the relative importance, historically or artistically, of the Grand Cathedrals. Certain objects, classed as megalithic and antique remains, may be the connecting links between the past and the present by which the antiquarian weaves the threads of his historical lore; but neither these nor the *reliques* which have been dug from the ground or untombed from later constructive elements, all of which are generously included in the general scheme by the Department of Beaux Arts, which has provided a fund for their preservation and care, have one tithe of the appealing interest which these great churches bespeak on behalf of the contemporary life of the times in which they were built, reflecting as they do many correlated events, and forming, in the interweaving of the history of their inception and construction, an epitome of well-nigh all the contemporary events of their environment, as well as the greater parts which they may have played in general affairs of state.

The best example of a part so played is that of the cathedral at Reims, which saw the crowning within its walls of nearly every monarch of France from the time of Philippe Augustus (1173) to that of Charles X. (1823). The monarchs of France, a long and picturesque line, have ever sought to ally the Church on their side, and right well they have been served, not ignoring, of course, certain notable lapses. In the main, however, the rulers and the people alike, whatever may have been the periodical dissensions, combined the forces which made possible the projection and erection of these noble examples of an art which, in the Gothic forms at least, here came to its greatest and most interesting phase.

Invasion, revolution, and the stress of weather and time, all played their part in the general desecrations which sooner or later followed; far the most serious of these visible damages reflected upon us to-day being the malpractices occurring at the Revolution, whether at the hands of a *sans culotte* or of the most respectable of bourgeois, led away by the excitement of revolt. The depredations were irreparable; they razed, burned, or ruthlessly shattered shrines, statues, or even reliquaries, as at Reims, where the Sainted Ampulla, which contained the miraculous oil brought by a dove from heaven, now preserved in reconstructed fragments in the sacristy, was dashed to pieces in a fury of uncontrollable wrath.

The paucity of sculptured decoration in certain places only too plainly designed for it is, too, frequently painfully apparent. Such sculptured decoration and glass as were easily to hand met with perhaps the most ready spoliation, while here and there, from some miraculous reason, a gem was left entire, though likely enough in a bruised and shattered setting.

This is what befell most of the great churches, and, for this reason, any work treating of these architectural glories of France must make due allowance in hazarding opinions as to the merit or lack of merit of any particular example as it now exists, as compared with what it may have been as it once was, or had it been completed in accordance with the original design.

In local and cathedral archives much valuable and interesting information exists, treating in this very manner such embellishments as may to-day be lacking; but unfortunately such facts are often buried in a mass of other irrelevant material which would make its discovery unusually difficult to any but a very learned local antiquarian. In this same connection, also, there is a dearth of illustrative material which can be depended upon as to minutiae or accuracy of detail. Hence it is possible to deal only with such general facts as may be supported by the best contemporary information based upon the researches of others. It may be well to note here, however, a fact which is often overlooked, namely, that the written records of France are not only very complete and exhaustive, but, with respect to Paris itself, to cite an example, the documentary history, consecutive and exact, from the time of the decline of Roman power is preserved intact, – a record which is perhaps not so true of any other large city in Europe.

In dealing with the cathedrals of the north, territorially, we have to consider those examples which are generally accepted as being all that a cathedral church should be. Of the first rank are those gathered not far from the confines of the mediæval Isle of France. They too, are best representative of the true Gothic spirit, while the southernmost examples, those of Dijon and Besançon, are of manifest Romanesque or Byzantine conception. Each, too, is somewhat reminiscent of the early German manner of building, the latter in respect to the double apse, which is often found across the Rhine, but seldom seen in France. The most northerly of all is at St. Omer, where are the somewhat battered remains of a satisfactory Gothic cathedral, although Amiens, not far to the south, is perhaps the ideal cathedral when considered from a general point merely. For the western representative, a line running due west from Paris almost into the Atlantic finds at Quimper, a small port fifteen miles from the sea, the Cathedral of St. Corentin, which, though not as lofty, is more of the manner of building of the Isle of France than one might suppose would be the case here in this outpost of Brittany, where are found so many evidences of Romanesque influences, retained long after they had been given over elsewhere.

Such, then, are the extremes of latitude and of architectural style which combine to give variety to the interest which is always aroused by the contemplation of the masterworks of any of the arts, where outside and contiguous influences have something in common therewith.

As a type to admire, there is no doubt but that the cathedral that possesses an apsidal termination of the easterly or choir end, as is nearly the universal custom in France, has charms and beauties which may be latent, but which are simply winning, when it comes to picturing the same structure with the squared-off ends so common in England.

It was Stevenson, was it not, who wrote of the satisfaction with which one always looks upon the east end of a French cathedral, "flanging out as it often does in sweeping terraces, and settling down broadly upon the earth as though it were meant to stay." Certainly nothing of the sort is to be more admired than the rare view of the choir buttresses of Notre Dame at Paris, likened unto "kneeling angels with half-spread wings;" the delicate and symmetrical choir buttresses of Amiens; the sheer fall of Beauvais; or the triply effective termination of the one-time cathedral of Noyon, which falls away in three gracefully gentle slopes to the ground. Again Stevenson's power as a descriptive writer lingers in our memory. He says, of no cathedral in particular, "where else is to be found so many elegant proportions growing one out of the other, and all together in one?.. Though I have heard a considerable variety of sermons, I have never yet heard one that was so expressive as a cathedral. 'Tis the best preacher itself, preaches day and night, not only telling you of man's art and aspirations in the past, but convicting your own soul of ardent sympathies; or rather, like

all good preachers, it sets you preaching to yourself, – and every man is his own doctor of divinity in the last resort."

To best estimate the charms and values of these architectural monuments one should consider; first, the history and topography of their environment, —*i. e.* as to why and when they may have been planned and built; secondly, their personality, as it were, – who were their founders, their patrons, their bishops; thirdly, the functions in which they may have partaken, any significant events which may have passed within their walls or centred within their sees; and fourthly, the artistic beauties of their fabric and its embellishments.

In most cases all of these values are so interwoven and indissolubly linked with the growth of the structure itself from its very earliest foundations that it is hardly possible to detail this information in true chronological order. The picturesque and romantic elements, of which there is not a little; the sordid and baneful, of which we may wish there were less; and the splendid ceremonials of Church and State; all go to make up a chronicle which no account, of even a special nature, could afford to neglect.

The picturesque elements of the conversion and baptism of Clovis by St. Remi at Reims in 496, where, on the site of the present cathedral, he was adjured to "revere that which thou didst burn and burn that which thou didst revere," and the crowning on the same spot of Charles VII. in 1429 through the efforts of the Maid, well represent these phases. The meanness and the unjustness of her later trial and condemnation in the Abbey Church of St. Ouen at Rouen is another. The affairs of state consist chiefly of the coronation ceremonies which mostly took place at Reims, and present a splendid record. Of the monarchs from 1173 onwards who were not here crowned, Henry IV. was crowned at Chartres; Napoleon I., at Paris; Louis Philippe, Louis XVIII., and Napoleon III. were not crowned at all.

Throughout this continuity of state events these great churches were performing their natural functions of the dissemination of the Word. Jealousies and bickerings took place, to be sure, but in the main there was harmony, if rivalry did exist; else it were not possible that so many of these splendid monuments would have endured to remind us of their past as well as present existence.

Certain of the sees were merged into greater ones, and others were abandoned altogether. In this connection there is a curious circumstance with regard to the one-time Bishop of Bethléem, who, driven from the Holy Land, was given a see at Clamecy, which see comprehended only the village in which he resided. What remains of the former cathedral is now an adjunct to a hotel. The rearrangement of political divisions of France after the Revolution was the further excuse for establishing but one diocese to a department, until to-day there are but eighty-four sees, administered by sixty-seven bishops and seventeen archbishops.

The itinerary of the conventional tour of the Continent usually keeps well to the beaten track, and so does the conventional traveller. He does not always get over to Reims, and often does not stop *en route* at Amiens; seldom visits Beauvais, and, unless he specially sets out to "tour" Brittany, a popular enough amusement of the lean of purse in these days, knows little of the unique charms of Tréguier, Quimper, or even of Le Mans, with its sublime choir, or of Evreux. As for even a nodding acquaintance with Noyon or Soissons, two of the most convincingly beautiful and impressive transitory types, they might as well be in the wilds of Kamchatka, though they are both situated in a region well travelled on all sides; while Laon, not far distant, is hardly known at all, except as a way station *en route* to Switzerland. The cathedrals of mid-France are, it is to be feared, even less known than would on first thoughts seem probable. A certain amount of sentimentality attaches itself to the chateaux of the Loire, and some acquaintance with their undeniable pleasing attributes is the portion of most travellers; but, again, such cathedral cities as Besançon, Nantes, and Langres are off the well-worn road, and their cathedrals might be myths so far as a general acquaintance with them is concerned; while the splendid churches of Bourges, Nevers, and Autun are likewise practically unknown to the casual traveller.

Tours, Orleans, and Chartres alone appear to be the only recognized representatives of this section of France which have hitherto attracted due attention.

With the southland this volume does not deal; that is a subject to be considered quite by itself, – and significantly, more real interest has been shown with respect to the architectural monuments of Avignon, Arles, Nîmes, Le Puy, Périgueux, Carcassonne, and Poitiers than to those of the Midi. Is it that the days of cheap travel and specially conducted tours, when ten or fifteen guineas will take one to the Swiss or Italian lakes, or e'en to Rome and Florence, has caused this apparent neglect of the country lying between? Certainly our forefathers travelled more wisely, but then prices and means of locomotion were on quite a different scale in those days, and not infrequently they were obliged to confine their travels and observations to more restricted areas.

Perhaps the most lucid arrangement of architectural species is that given by De Caumont's "Abécêdaire d'Architecture," which divides the country ethnologically into Brittany; Normandy; Flanders, including Artois and Picardy; Central France (the Isle of France, Champagne, Orleanois, Main, Anjou, Touraine, and Berri); and Burgundy, comprehending the former divisions of Franche Comté, Lorraine, Alsace (now Belfort), Nivernois, Bourbonnois, and Lyonnais. Of the above divisions, only that of the Isle of France with La Brie was originally held by the Crown. The political divisions throughout France now number eighty-seven departments, taking their names from the principal topographical features, and replacing in 1790 the thirty-two mediæval provinces, each of which had their own characteristics of social and political life, and of which each in turn progressed, stagnated, or fell backward according to local or periodical conditions. Both the arts of peace and of war have left an ineradicable impress. In the thirteenth century the various provinces became welded together into one perfect whole under Philippe Augustus and the sainted Louis, but retained to no small extent, even as they do unto to-day, their distinctive local characteristics.

Because of its cathedrals alone, the Isle of France stands preëminent among the provinces for each of the thirteen provincial styles of architecture which are allocated by the Société des Monuments Historiques. A comparatively small and unified province, it comprehends within and contiguous to its borders more of the attributes and principles of a consistent Mediæval architectural style than is elsewhere to be observed. From Rouen on the west to Reims on the east, northward to Amiens and southwesterly to Chartres, are grouped the show pieces of the world's Gothic architecture. Not alone with the respect to the Grand Cathedrals is this region so richly endowed, but also because of the smaller and less important, but no less attractive or interesting examples of Noyon, Senlis, Laon, Soissons, with their one-time cathedral churches and other varied ecclesiastical and secular edifices.

Beauvais, Gisors, Gournay, Cires-les-Mello, Creil, Royamont, Nogent-les-Vierges, Villers-St. – Pol, indeed nearly every village and town within the royal domain, present values and comparisons which place nearly all of its contemporary structures, be they large or small, at a grand height above those of other less prolific sections. Lest it be thought that this statement is drawn largely, and that fineness and balance of estimate are lacking, it suffices to state that it is not alone from study and research, but from frequent personal intimacies that the region has ever proved an inexhaustible store of architectural values, and one which most well-known authorities, with one accord, place in the very first rank.

Arthur Young, than whom no more perspicuous observer has ever chronicled his impressions, wrote (1704) that to see the best of France, the part most varied in topography, and resourceful and attractive in its monuments, one should land at Havre and follow the sinuosity of the Seine to Paris, thence the highroad to Moulins and on to the Rhône at Valence, an outline which somewhat approaches the limitations of territory of which this book treats. To be sure, he wrote of economic and agricultural conditions, and he mostly made his pertinent observations on land holdings, stock keeping, and hedgerows, or rather that lack of them which is so apparent throughout France; but these details of themselves only suggest more complete evidences of the existing forces which

indicate the growth of the wealth and power which has made this region so rich in its architectural memorials of the past, and which ought to more than compensate for any lack of scenic grandeur.

It is to be regretted, of course, that none of these larger cathedrals are to be seen to-day in their completely perfected forms. To what extent would not the glories of Reims, of Amiens, of Beauvais, or of Rouen, be enhanced, were it possible for us to even imagine their splendour, were they possessed of the symmetry and well-favoured situation of the Dom at Cologne? And so it is that we can but feel regret when we mentally note the lack of nave at Beauvais, of spires at Bourges, and, yet again, regret even with more pain the monstrousness of the cast-iron *flèche* which has been added to the central tower at Rouen. But these are after all minor imperfections – seldom, if ever, in aught but pleasurable anticipation, do we see in the masterpieces of art or nature a perfect unity; so why seek to negative their virtues by futile criticism? It would seem to be all-sufficient that such details, sins of omission or commission, should be noted merely, that we may pass on to other charms which must compel our allegiance.

When we visit the cathedrals of the Isle of France, we are at once in the midst of the best examples of French Gothic architecture, or of French Mediæval architecture, if the phrase is to be preferred.

PART I

Transition Examples

I

INTRODUCTORY

Soissons, with Noyon and Laon, all within perhaps thirty miles of one another, may be said to best represent the nurturing and development of the early Gothic of France. These simple and somewhat plain types exemplify the style which was in vogue at the same time in the Low Countries. It is good Gothic, to be sure, – at least, good as to its planning, – but without that ornateness or lightness known to-day as characteristic of the distinctive French type, which so early developed boldly and beautifully.

One observes the resemblances in style between the notable cathedral at Tournai, in Belgium, the neighbouring types of French Flanders, and the cathedrals of this trinity of French towns lying contiguous thereto, Noyon itself being for long interdependent with the see of Tournai. Nevertheless, it is a beautiful type which was cradled here in the country called, by Cæsar, Suessiones; and difficult it would be to attempt to assign preëminence to any one edifice.

Noyon, without a doubt, has the greatest charm of environment, and is of itself in every way a pleasing and satisfying example of what should most truly inspire and impress us in a cathedral. Stevenson describes it as being "the happiest inspiration of mankind, a thing as specious as a statue at the first glance, yet, on examination, as lively and interesting as a forest in detail. The height of its spires cannot be taken by trigonometry: they measure absurdly short, but how tall they are to the admiring eye... I sat outside of my hotel and the sweet groaning thunder of the organ floated out of the church like a summons"; – and much more of the same sort, all of which tells us that, once we find ourselves on a plane of intimacy with a great church, we continually receive new impressions and inspirations, and it is in this vein that one who has known this group of simple but fascinating churches on their own ground, so to put it, can but seek to convey the idea that it is good that we have such contrasting types as a relief and an antidote to an appetite which otherwise might become sated.

II NOTRE DAME DE LAON

For over twelve hundred years, until the see was abolished at the Revolution, Laon was the seat of a bishop who in point of rank was second only to the primate at Reims. Crowning the apex of a long isolated hill, upon which the entire town, now a fortress of the third class, is situated, the cathedral of Notre Dame de Laon, still so called locally, has endured since the beginning of the twelfth century, and may be considered a thoroughly representative transition example.

The present structure is on the site of one burned in 1112, and during comparatively recent years has been entirely restored.

Its crowning glory is in the disposition and number of its fine group of towers: two flank the western façade, and are rectangular at the base, dwindling to a smaller polygon, which is flanked with corner belfries and pierced by a tall lancet in the central structure, showing a wonderful lightness and open effect. A curious and unique feature of these towers is the addition of four oxen in carven stone perched high aloft in the belfries. These sculptured animals may be merely another expression of symbols of superstition, and if so are far more pleasing than some of the hideous and monstrous gargoyles oftentimes seen. Two other towers, each 190 feet in height, adjoin the transepts, to each of which is attached a double-storied, apsidal, ancient chapel. Two similarly projected towers are lacking. The lantern is square, with a shallow, conical, modern roof.

In the transition type Romanesque influences were evidently dying hard. The Gothic was seldom full blown, and at Laon shows but the merest trace of pointedness to the arches of the western façade, either in the portals or in the higher openings.

The lack of a circular termination to the choir is but another indication of a link with a transitory past; an undeniably false note and one very unusual in France, the choir being of the squared-off variety so common in England. This may be coincident with the English custom of the time, or it may be directly due to a local English influence; – most probably the latter, inasmuch as an English prelate held the see for a time, and the city, in the early fifteenth century, was for a number of years in English hands. It is significant that in some of the smaller churches of the diocese is to be noted the same treatment.

The rose windows of both the eastern and western façades are Gothic in inception and treatment, and are unusually acceptable specimens of these supreme efforts of the French mediæval builders, the glass therein being distinctly good, though perhaps not remarkable.

The transepts are rectangular and, with the ensemble of the entire structure, were their towers completed, there would be produced, not only a unique example, but a towering effect only a degree less interesting than the perfectly proportioned pyramidal form so much admired in the perfectly developed Gothic.

The interior is equally attractive with the exterior, and, though the church is not by any means of remarkable dimensions, it presents in its appropriate disposition of detail a far more roomy and pleasing arrangement than many a larger example.

The transepts are divided into a nave and side aisles, the columns which partition them, like those of the nave proper, being cylindrical and of massive proportions, which, however, lighten as they rise to the vaulting. They are unusually symmetrical when viewed together, the capitals of the lower series being ornately carved, each of a varying design.

Above the aisles are lofty galleries. The nave chapels were added in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The stained glass, like that of the rose windows, is in the nave distinctly good, particularly that of the lower range on the southerly side. The pulpit, of carved wood of the Renaissance period, is not of the importance and quality of this class of work to be seen across the Rhine border.

The former Bishop's palace, adjoining the left of the choir, is now the Palais de Justice. A few remains of a former Gothic cloister are to be remarked, surrounded by the later construction.

III

NOTRE DAME DE NOYON

In Notre Dame at Noyon, Notre Dame at Laon, and the cathedral at Tournai, is to be noted the very unusual division of the interior elevation into four ranges of openings, this effect being only seen at Paris and Rouen among the large cathedrals. Noyon and Laon borrowed, perhaps, from Tournai, where building was commenced at least a century before either of the French examples first took form. It is perhaps not essential that such an arrangement be made in order to give an effect of loftiness, which might not otherwise exist; indeed, it is a question if the reverse is not actually the case, though the effect is undeniably one of grandeur. Soissons, too, may rightly enough be included in the group, though the points of resemblance in this case are confined to the rising steps to either transept, coupled with the joint possession of circumambient aisles, and at least the suggested intent of circular apsidal terminations to the transepts; though it appears that here this plan was ultimately changed and one transept finished off with the usual rectangular ending.

In this Noyon plainly excels, and there is found nowhere else in France the perfect trefoil effect produced by the apsidal terminations of both transepts and choir. So far as the transepts are concerned, they are of the manner affected by the builders on the Rhine, notably in the Minster at Bonn, at Cologne, and again at Neuss in the neighbourhood of Cologne. With Noyon apparently nothing is lacking either in the perfections of its former cathedral or in its immediate environment. The country round about is thoroughly agricultural, and free from the soot and grime of a manufacturing community. Amid a setting at once historic and romantic, it has for neighbours the chateaux of Coucy and Perrifonds, with Compiègne and Chantilly not far distant. The town is unprogressive enough, and the vast barge traffic of the Oise sidles by, not a mile away, as if it were all unconscious of the existence of any signs of modern civilization. As a matter of fact, it hardly is modern. The accommodation for the weary traveller is of a satisfying and gratifying quality, as the comparatively few visitors to the place well know. The city is an ancient foundation, having been known as the Noviodunum of the Romans. Here Charlemagne was crowned King of the Franks in 768, and Hugh Capet elected king in 987; and here, in an important stronghold of Catholicism, as it had long been, Calvin was born in 1509.

Altogether there is much to be found here to charm and stimulate our imagination. As a type the cathedral stands preëminent. As to detail and state of preservation, they, too, leave little to be desired, though the appreciative author of a charming and valuable work treating of a good half hundred or more of the "architectural glories of France" bemoans the lack of a satisfying daily "Office." This may be a fault, possibly, if such be really the case. The fabric of the church has stood the wear and tear of time and stress exceeding well. Built in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, it is a thoroughly harmonious and pleasing whole, and we can well believe all that may have been said of it by the few able critics who have passed judgment upon its style, as well as the sentiment conveyed by the phrase that it is "one of the most graceful and lovable of all the cathedrals of France." The bishopric was suppressed after the Revolution, and the church is now a dependency of the Bishop of Beauvais.

The elongated belfry towers are perhaps the first and most noticeable feature; secondly, the overhanging porch with its supporting frontal buttresses; thirdly, the before-mentioned tri-apsidal effect of the easterly end; and, last but not least, the general grouping of the whole structure in combination with the buildings which are gathered about its haunches, though with no suspicion of a detracting element as in some sordid and crowded cities, where, in spite of undeniable picturesqueness, is presented a squalor and poverty not creditable either to the city of its habitation or to the cathedral authorities themselves. From every point of vantage the steeples of Notre Dame

de Noyon add the one ingredient which makes a unity of the entire ensemble, – a true old-world atmosphere, a town seen in not too apparent a state of unrepair and certainly not a degenerate.

The interior presents no less striking or noble features. It is not stupendous or remarkably awesome; but it is grand, with a subtleness which is inexpressible. Round and pointed arches are intermixed, and there is a notable display of the round variety in the upper ranges of the quadrupled elevation of the nave, the lightness, which might otherwise have been marred, being preserved through the employment of a series of simple lancets in the clerestory of the choir. Rearward of the south transept are the chapter-house and the scanty remains of a Gothic cloister, where a somewhat careworn combination of the forces of nature and art have culminated in giving an unusually old-world charm to this apparently neglected gem, as well representative of early French Gothic as any in existence to-day.

IV NOTRE DAME DE SOISSONS

Soissons, the other primitive example, is at once a surprise and a disappointment. From the railway, on entering the town, one is highly impressed with the grouping of a sky-piercing, twin-spired structure of ample and symmetrical proportions; and at some distance therefrom is seen another building, possibly enough of less importance. Curiously, it is the cathedral which is the less imposing, and, until one is well up with the beautifully formed spires, he hardly realizes that they represent all that is left of the majestic Abbey of *St. Jean des Vignes*, where Becket spent nine long years. It is a mere bit of stage scenery, with height and breadth, but no thickness. It is a pity that such a charming structure as this noble building must once have been is now left to crumble. The magnificent rose window, or rather the circular opening which it once occupied, is now but a mere orifice, of great proportions, but destitute of glazing. The entire confines of the building, which crowns a slight eminence at the entrance of the town, are now given over to the use of the military authorities.

A little to the right lies the one-time cathedral of Notre Dame, Soissons being another of the *ci-devant* bishoprics suppressed after the Revolution by the redistribution which gave but one diocese to a Department. Though not unpleasing, its façade is marred by its lack of symmetry, while the tower, which rises on the right 215 feet, is not sufficiently striking to redeem what otherwise is an ordinary enough ensemble. The tower to the left was never raised above where it now ends, and the façade, lacking the charm which the edifice might otherwise have had, were the towers as complete and well proportioned as are those of a later date which grace the remains of the old abbey, will be for ever wanting until this completion be carried out.

Romanesque is plainly noticeable in mixture with the early Gothic. The three portals are not remarkable, or uniform, and are severely plain, and, though of a noticeable receding depth, are bare and unpeopled. A well-proportioned rose window, though not so large as many in the greater cathedrals, has graceful radiating spokes and good glass. This is flanked by two unpierced lancet-pointed window-frames which but accentuate the plainness of the entire façade. Above is an arcaded gallery which was intended to cross the entire front, but which now stops where the gable joins the northerly tower. Restoration has been carried on, not sparingly, but in good taste, with the result that, in spite of its newness at the present writing, it appears as a consistent and thoroughly conscientious piece of work, and not the mere patchwork that such repairs usually suggest.

The guide-books tell one that Soissons is famous for its trade in haricot beans, and incidentally for the beans themselves, and for the great number of sieges which it has undergone, the last being that conducted by the Germans, who took possession in October, 1870, after a bombardment of three days.

Fergusson makes the statement, which is well taken, that the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Soissons, while not in any sense meriting the term magnificent, presents, in its interior arrangements, at least, a most symmetrical and harmonious ensemble. A curious though not unpleasing effect is produced by the blackened pointing of the interior masonry, of piers, walls, and vaulting alike. An unusual feature is the circumambient aisles to the transepts and the suggestion that a trefoil apsidal termination was originally thought of, when the rebuilding was taken in hand in the twelfth century. The transept is so completed on the south side, which possesses also an ancient portal, and, with the two at Noyon so done, presents a feature which is as much a relief from the usual rectangle as are the rounded choirs of Continental churches a beauty in advance of the accepted English manner of treatment of this detail.

The choir rises loftily above the transepts and nave, and, while the general proportions are not such as to suggest undue narrowness, the effect is of much greater height than really exists. This, too, is apparent when viewing the abside itself.

The Chapel of the Rosary in the north transept is overtopped by an effective arrangement of perpendicular window-framing, supporting a beautiful rose window of the spoke variety. It is safe to say that, had the entire space provided been glazed, the effect of lighting would have been unique among the cathedrals of the world.

The only other decorative embellishments are some tapestries, a few well-preserved tombs, and an "Adoration" supposed to be by Rubens, which is perhaps more likely to be genuine, because of the situation of the church near unto Flanders, than many other examples whose claims have even less to support them.

PART II

The Grand Group

I

INTRODUCTORY

Expert opinion, so called, may possibly differ as to just what, or what not, cathedrals of France should be included in this term. The French proverb known of all guide-book makers should give a clue as to those which at least may not be left out.

"Clocher de Chartres, Nef d'Amiens
Choeur de Beauvais et Portale de Reims."

Rouen, Paris, and Le Mans should be included, as well possibly as the smaller but no less convincing examples at Sées, Sens, Laon, and Troyes, as being of an analogous manner of building, and, by all that goes to make up the components of a really great church, Bourges might well be considered in the same group. For practical and divisional purposes it is perhaps well to compose an octette of the churches of the Isle of France and those lying contiguous thereto, Paris, Beauvais, St. Denis, Amiens, Reims, Rouen, Chartres, and Le Mans, which may be taken together as representative of the greatest art expression of the Gothic builders, as well as being those around which centred the most significant events of Church and State. To attempt to catalogue even briefly the charms and notable attributes of even the first four, would require more than the compass of several volumes the size of the present, whereas the attempt made herein is merely to lead with as little digression as possible up to the chief glories for which they are revered, and to suggest some of the many important and epoch-making events intimately associated therewith. More would be impossible, manifestly, unless the present work were to transcend the limitations which were originally planned for it, hence it is with no halting assertion that we enter boldly upon that chronology or résumé which, in a way, presents a marshalled array of correlated facts which the reader may care to follow in further detail in the list of bibliographical references included at the end of the volume.

Certain facts relating to the history and the architectural features generally of these great cathedrals are known to all, and are chronicled with more or less completeness in many valuable and authoritative works, ranging from the humble though necessary guide-book to the extensive if not exhaustive architectural work of reference. The facts given herein are such, then, as are often overlooked in the before-mentioned classes of works, and as such are presented, not so much with the avowed object of imparting information, as to remind the reader of the wealth of interest that exists with relation to these shrines of religious art. This seems to be the only preamble possible to the chapters which attempt to even classify these magnificent buildings, wherein much is attempted and so little accomplished in recounting their varied attractions. Let this explanation stand, therefore, for any seeming paucity of description which may exist.

II NOTRE DAME D'AMIENS

The ever impressive Cathedral of Notre Dame d'Amiens is in most English minds the *beau idéal* of a French cathedral. It is contemporary with Salisbury in period, at least, but it has little to remind one of the actual features of this edifice. Often associated therewith, as a similar type, it has little in reality in common, except that each is representative of a supreme style. Beyond this it is hard to see how any expert, archæologist, antiquary, or what not, would seek to discover relationship between two such distinct types. Salisbury is the ideal English cathedral as to situation, surroundings, and general charm and grace. This no one would attempt to deny; but, in another environment, how different might it not appear, – as for instance placed beside Amiens, where in one particular alone, the mere height of nave and choir, it immediately dwindles into insignificance. Under such conditions its graceful spire becomes dwarfed and attenuated. Need more be said? – The writer thinks not, since the present work does not deal with the comparative merits of any two cathedrals or of national types; but the suggestion should serve to demonstrate how impossible it is for any writer, however erudite he may be, to attempt to assign precedence, or even rank, among the really great architectural works of an era. This observation is true of many other examples of art expression.

The cathedral at Amiens is dedicated to the Virgin, and is built in the general form of a Latin cross. Over the principal doorway of the south portal, on one of the upper plinths, may be seen the inscription which places the date of the present edifice.

The work was undertaken by one Robert de Luzarche, in the episcopate of Evrard de Fouilloy, the forty-fifth Bishop of Amiens, whose tomb may be seen just within the western doorway, and occupies the site of other structures which had been variously devastated by fire or invasion in 850, 1019, 1137, and 1218. For fifty years the work went on expeditiously under various bishops and their architects. "Saint" Louis, Blanche of Castille, Philippe the Hardy, and the city fathers all aided the work substantially, and the fabric speedily took on its finished form. Through the later centuries it still preserved its entity, and even during the Revolution its walls escaped destruction and defilement through the devotion of its adherents.

In later days important work and restoration has been carried out under the paternal care and at the expense of the state; and the city itself only recently contributed 45,000 francs for the clearing away of obstructing buildings.

A French writer has said, "It is only with the aid of a Bible and a history of theology that it is possible to elucidate the vast iconographic display of the marvellous west front of the cathedral at Amiens." Like Reims, its three portals of great size are peopled with a throng of statues. The central portal, known as the *Porche du Souvenir*, contains the statue of the Good God of Amiens; that on the right is called after the *Mère de Dieu*, and that on the left for *St. Fermin the Martyr*. Above the gables is the "Gallery of Kings," just below the enormous rose windows. Above rise the two towers of unequal loftiness, and lacking, be it said, thickness in its due proportion. The carven figures in general are not considered the equal in workmanship of those at Reims, though the effect and arrangement is similar. For a complete list of them, numbering some hundreds on this façade alone, the reader must refer to some local guide-book, of which several are issued in the city.

The south portal, the *Portal de la Vierge dorée* or *Portal de Saint Honoré*, shares company with the west façade in its richness of sculpture and its rose window and its gable. Here also are to be seen the supporting buttresses which spring laterally from the wall of the transept and cross with those which come from the choir.

The north portal, on the side of the Bishop's Palace, does not show the same richness as the others, though perhaps more than ordinarily ornate.

The spire above the transept crossing is a work of the sixteenth century, and is perhaps more remarkable than its rather diminutive appearance, in contrast with the huge bulk of the edifice, would indicate.

The extreme height of nave and choir (147 feet), adds immeasurably to the grand effect produced by the interior, a height in proportion to breadth nearly double that usual in the English cathedrals. The vaulting is borne aloft by over one hundred columns. The natural attribute of such great dimension is a superb series of windows, a promise more than fulfilled by the three great rose windows and the lofty clerestory of nave and choir. The sixteenth century glass is exceedingly profuse and brilliant.

The lateral chapels of the nave were added subsequent to the work of the early builders, all being of the sixteenth century, while the eleven choir chapels are of the thirteenth century, all with very ornate iron grilles, which are a feature only second to a remarkable series of "choir stalls," numbering over one hundred, showing a wonderful variety of delicate carved figures of the sixteenth century, the work of one Jean Turpin, the subjects being mainly Biblical.

A stone screen with elaborate sculptures in high relief surrounds the choir, that on the south representing the legend of St. Firmin, the patron of Picardy, and that on the north, scenes connected with the life of John the Baptist. In a side chapel dedicated to St. John reposes the alleged head of John the Baptist. Others have appeared elsewhere from time to time, but as they are not now recognized as being genuine, and the said apostle not being hydra-headed, it is possible that there will be those who will choose to throw the weight of their opinions in favour of the claim of Amiens.

The flying buttresses at Amiens are not of the singular lightness associated with this notably French characteristic; they are in the main, however, none the less effective for that, and assuredly, so far as the work which they have to perform is concerned, it was doubtless necessary that they should be of more than ordinary strength.

The view of the ensemble from the river shows the massiveness and general proportions in a unique and superb manner. Amiens is not otherwise an attractive city, a bustle of grand and cheap hotels, decidedly a place to be taken *en route*, not like Beauvais, where one may well remain as long as fancy wills and not feel the too strong hand of progress intruding upon his ruminations.

III

ST. PIERRE DE BEAUVAIS

Beauvais is by no means an inaccessible place, though how often have we known one who could not tell in what part of France it was situated. Of course, being "off the line" is sufficient excuse for the majority of hurried travellers to pass it by, but, leaving this debatable point out of the question, let us admit, for the nonce, that it is admirably located if one only chooses to spend a half-day or more in visiting the charmingly interesting city and its cathedral, or what there is of it, for it exists only as a luminous height *sans* nave, *sans* tower, and *sans* nearly everything, except a choir of such immensity that to see it is to marvel if not to admire. It is indeed as Hope has said, "a miracle of loftiness and lightness; appearing as if about to soar into the air."

How many readers, who recognize the charms for which the cathedral is most revered, know that it was intended to rank as the

St. Peter's of the north, and like its Roman prototype, was to surpass all other contemporary structures in size and magnificence. This was marked out for it when, in the middle sixteenth century, the builders of its central spire, which fell shortly after, sought to rival the Italian church in a vast Gothic fabric which should be the dominant northern type in contra-distinction to that of the south. This of itself, were there no other contributory interests, which there are to a very great degree, should be all-sufficient to awaken the desire on the part of every one who journeys Parisward to obtain a more intimate acquaintance with this great work. Here was an instance of ambition overleaping itself, – exceeding by far the needs and conditions of its environment and like many another ill-planned venture, it fell to ruin through a lack of logic and mental balance. To-day we see a restored fabric, lacking all the attributes of a great church except that which is encompassed by that portion lying eastward of the nave proper, its frail buttresses knitted together by iron rods, its piers latterly doubled in number, and many more visible signs of an attempt to hold its walls and roofs up to the work they have to perform.

The present structure, in so far as certain of its components go, was commenced within five years of Amiens (1225), which calls to mind the guide-book comparison, which seems so appropriate that it must really have previously originated from some other source, – Amiens, "a giant in repose;" Beauvais, "a Colossus on tiptoe."

Its designer built not wisely, nor in this case too well, for before the end of the century the roof had fallen, and this after repeated miscalculations and failures. At this time the intermediate piers of the choir were built and a general modified plan adopted.

Ruskin's favourite simile, with respect to St. Pierre de Beauvais, was that no Alpine precipice had the sheer fall of the walls of this choir, – or words to that effect, which is about as far-fetched as many other of his dictums, which have since been exploded by writers of every degree of optimism and pessimism. Certainly it is a great height to which this choir rises, one hundred and fifty-three feet it has been called, which probably exceeds that of Amiens by a dozen or more feet, though authorities (*sic*) vary with regard to these dimensions, as might be supposed; but it is no more like unto a wall of rock than it is to a lighthouse.

With the crumbling of the sixteenth-century spire on Ascension Day, 1573, restoration of the transepts was undertaken and work on the nave resumed, which only proceeded, however, to the extent of erecting one bay to the westward, which stands to this day, the open end filled in with scantling, weather proofing, and what not, – a bare, gaunt, ugly patch. Had it been possible to complete the work on its original magnificent lines, it would have been the most stupendous Gothic fabric the world has ever known.

Not entirely without beauty, in spite of its great proportions, it is more with wonder than admiration that one views both its details and proportions. Though it is perhaps unfair to condemn

its style as unworthy of the Augustan age of French architecture, surely the ambition with which the work was undertaken was a laudable one enough, and it is only from the fact that it spells failure in the eyes of many who lack initiative in their own make-up, that it only qualifiedly may be called a great work.

The choir, which now dates from 1322, perforce looks unduly short, by reason of the absence of a nave to add to the effect of horizontal stability; and the great height of the adjoining transept; but the chevet and buttresses are certainly a marvel of grace and towering forms.

The portals of the transept are of the period of Francis I., with flowing lines and ornate decorations – "having passed the severity and ethical standards of maturity, and progressed well along the path to senility," as a vigorous Frenchman has put it. True enough in its application is this livid sentiment, – perhaps, – but its jewel-like south portal, like the "*gemmed*" west front of Tours, forms an attractive enough presentment to please most observers who do not delve too deeply into cause and effect. The north portal is less ornate, but its beautifully carved doors are by the same hand as that which worked the opposite portal. The ornamental stonework here is unusual, suggesting an arrangement which may or may not have been intended as a representation of the "Tree of Jesse." In any case it is a remarkable work of flowing Gothic "branches," which, though mainly lacking its intended interspersed figures, is not only unique among exterior decorations, but appears as a singularly appropriate treatment of a grand doorway.

Adjoining the choir on the right is a sacristy occupying a small structure, and to the westward is a fragmentary edifice known as the *Basse Œuvre*, – one of the oldest existing buildings in France; a Romano-Byzantine work, variously stated as of the sixth to eighth century and forming a portion of the original church which occupied the site of the present Cathedral.

The general impressiveness of this great church – the memory which most of us will carry away – is caused by its immensity, its loftiness, and the general effect of lightness. These form an irresistible galaxy of features which can hardly fail to produce a new and startling sensation upon any observer.

As to decorative embellishments, the church is by no means lacking. The coloured glass, typical of the best period of the art, is luxurious and extensive; that contained in the north and south transept rose windows being the exceedingly beautiful work of Le Prince, a celebrated sixteenth-century artist.

Numerous side chapels surround the ambulatory of the choir, and on the west wall of the transept are hung the eight tapestries after the sixteenth-century Raphael cartoons now at South Kensington. These tapestries are, it is to be presumed, late copies, since, of the two early sets woven at Arras, one is preserved in the Vatican and the other at the Museum at Berlin. A modern fresco of Jeanne Hachette, a local Amazon, adorns one of the choir chapels. A modern astronomical clock, with numerous dials, striking figures, and crowing cocks, is placed near the north transept. It might naturally be supposed that in our day the canons of good taste would plead against such a mere "curio" being housed in a noble church.

The former Bishop's Palace, dating from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, is now the Palace of Justice. The present episcopal residence is immediately to the north of the Cathedral and is modern.

As a tapestry-making centre Beauvais ranks with the famous Gobelin Manufactory at Paris.

IV NOTRE DAME DE ROUEN

Rouen, of all the mediæval cities of France, is ever to the fore in the memories of the mere traveller for pleasure. In no sense are its charms of a negative quality, or few in number. Quite the reverse is the case; but the city's apparent attraction is its extreme accessibility, and the glammers that a metropolis of rank throws over itself; for it must not be denied that a countrified environment has not, for all, the appealing interest of a great city. It is to this, then, that Rouen must accredit the throngs of strangers which continually flock to its doors from the Easter time to late autumn. In addition there are its three great churches, so conveniently and accessibly placed that the veriest tyro in travel can but come upon them whichever way he strolls. Other monuments of equal rank there are, too, and altogether, whether it be the mere hurried pecking of a bird of passage, or the more leisurely attack of the studiously inclined, Rouen offers perhaps much greater attractions than are possessed by any other French city of equal rank.

So closely, too, have certain events of English history been interwoven with scenes and incidents which have taken place here, that the wonder is that it is not known even more intimately by that huge number of persons who annually rush across France to Switzerland or Italy.

Chroniclers of the city's history, its churches, and its institutions have not been wanting, in either French or English; and even the guide-books enlarge (not unduly) upon its varied charms. Once possessing thirty-two churches, sixteen yet remain; quite one-half of which may be numbered to-day as of appealing interest. *En passant*, it may be stated that here at Rouen, in both Notre Dame and the Abbey Church of St. Ouen, is found that gorgeous functionary, commonly called "the Suisse," who seeks your gold or a portion thereof, in return for which he will favour you by opening an iron wicket into the choir, an incumbrance unnoticed elsewhere, except at Paris and St. Denis.

The late Gothic church of St. Ouen, where the Maid of Orleans received her fatal sentence, shows a wonderful unity of design even as to its modern western towers; a consistency not equally the possession of the neighbouring cathedral, or even of most great churches. Altogether, this grand building is regarded as an unparalleled example of the realization of much that is best of Gothic architecture at its greatest height. In its central tower alone – which may or may not be suggestive of a market-basket, accordingly as you will take Ruskin's opinion, or form one of your own – is the least evidence of the developed flamboyant found. Its interior is clean-cut and free of obstruction; the extreme length of its straight lines, both horizontal and perpendicular, entirely freed from chapel or choir screen, embrace and uphold its "walls of glass" in an unequalled manner.

In strong contrast to this expressively graceful style is the ultraflorid type of St. Maclou, the other of that trinity of architectural splendours, which, with the Cathedral of Notre Dame, form the chief ecclesiastical monuments of the city. St. Maclou, which dates from the early fifteenth century, though not of the grand proportions of either of the other great churches, being rather of the type of the large parish church as it is known in England, holds one spellbound by the very daring of its ornaments and tracery, but contains no trace of non-Gothic. The French passion for the curved line is nowhere more manifest than here (and in the west front of Notre Dame), where flowing tracery of window, doorway, portal, and, in general, all exterior ornament, is startling in its audacity. To view these two contrasting types before making acquaintance with the Cathedral of Notre Dame itself, is to prepare oneself for a consideration in some measure of a combination of the charms of both, woven into one fabric. Nowhere, at least in no provincial town of France, are to be found such a categorical display of ecclesiastical architectural details as here.

Rouen has from the second century been an important seat of Christianity. St. Nicaise, not to be confounded with him of the same name of Reims, first held a conversion here and was shortly followed by St. Mellor, who founded the city's first church, on the site of the present cathedral.

In succeeding centuries this foundation gradually took shape and form until, with the occupation by the Norsemen under Rollo, was founded a dynasty which fostered the development of theology and the arts in a manner previously unknown. The cathedral was enlarged at this time, and upon his death in 930 Rollo was interred therein, as was also his son in 943. Richard the Fearless followed with further additions and enlargements, his son Richard being made its forty-third archbishop. From this time on, the great church-building era, Christian activities were notably at work, here as elsewhere, and during the prolific eleventh century great undertakings were in progress; so much so that what was practically a new church received its consecration, and dedication to Our Lady, in 1063, in the presence of him who later was to be known as the Conqueror. To-day it stands summed up thus – a grand building, rich, confused, and unequal in design and workmanship.

The lower portion of the northwest tower, called the *Tour St. Romain*, is all that is left of the eleventh-century building, the remainder of which was destroyed by fire in 1200. Rebuilding followed in succeeding years and shows work of many styles. Additions, repairs, and interpolations were incorporated with the fragment of the tower, so that the structure as we now know it stood complete with the early thirteenth century. Viollet-le-Duc is the authority for the statement that the apse and transept, chapels, choir, and two doorways of the west façade were quite complete before the influence of the perfected Gothic of the Isle of France was even felt. One Enguerrand was the chief designer of the new church, assisted by Jean d'Andeli as master mason. The early century saw the nave chapels built, having been preceded by the *Portail aux Libraires*, a sort of cloistered north entrance, still so referred to, one of the most charming and quiet old-world retreats to be found to-day even within the hallowed precincts of a cathedral. The *Portail de la Calende* did not follow until a century later, when the *Tour St. Romain* was completed to its roof; at which time was also added the screen or arcade which separates the *Portail aux Libraires* from the street.

This century, too, saw the beginning of the famous *Tour de Beurre*, built mostly by the contributions of those who paid for the indulgence of being allowed to eat butter during Lent. Its foundation was laid in 1487 under Archbishop Robert de Croixmore, and it was completed under Cardinal d'Amboise in 1507. A chapel at the base of the tower is dedicated to St. Stephen. The ornate decorations of the west front, added by Georges d'Amboise, are mainly of the sixteenth century and form no part of the original plan or design. It borders upon the style we have since learned to decry, but it is, at least, marvellous as to the skill with which its foliated and crocketed pinnacles and elaborate traceries are worked. Ruskin was probably right in this estimate at least, – "The central gable is the most exquisite piece of pure flamboyant style extant." At the present day this west front is undergoing such restoration and general repair that the entire gable, rose window, and part of the flanking towers are completely covered with a most hideous array of scaffolding.

The central spire as it exists to-day, in reality an abomination of abominations, is naturally enough admired by all when first viewed from afar. It certainly looks not dwarfed, or even fragile, but simply delicate, and withal graceful, an opinion which ultimate association therewith speedily dispels. It must be one of the very first examples of modern iron or steel erection in the world, dating from 1827, following three former spires, each of which was burned. The architect responsible for this monstrosity sought to combine two fabrics in incoherent proportions. More than one authority decries the use of iron as a constructive element, and Chaucer's description of the Temple of Mars in the Knight's Tale reads significantly:

"Wrought all of burned steel...
Was long and straight and ghastly for to see."

The great part of the exterior of this remarkable church is closely hidden by a rather squalid collection of buildings. Here and there they have been cleared away, but, like much of the process of restoration, where new fabric is let into the old, the incongruity is quite as objectionably apparent

as the crumbling stones of another age. *Notre Dame de Rouen* is singularly confined, but there seems no help for it, and it is but another characteristic of the age in which it was built, – that the people either sought the shelter of churchly environment, or that the church was only too willing to stretch forth its sheltering arms to all and sundry who would lie in its shadow.

In an assignment of ranking beauty to its external features, the decorative west front must manifestly come first; next the *Portail aux Libraires*, with its arcaded gateway and the remains of the booksellers' stalls which still surround its miniature courtyard; then, perhaps, should follow the *Tour St. Romain* and the *Portail de la Calende*, with its charmingly recessed doorway and flanking lancet arches. The sculptured decorations of all are for the most part intact and undisfigured. The gable of the southern doorway rises pointedly until its apex centres with the radiated circular window above, which, by the way, is not of the exceeding great beauty of the other two rose windows, which rank with those at Reims and Chartres as the *beaux ideals* of these distinctly French achievements.

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