

INTRODUCTION¹

1. THE Science of Architecture, followed out to its full extent, is one of the noblest of those which have reference only to the creations of human minds. It is not merely a science of the rule and compass, it does not consist only in the observation of just rule, or of fair proportion: it is, or ought to be, a science of feeling more than of rule, a ministry to the mind, more than to the eye. If we consider how much less the beauty and majesty of a building depend upon its pleasing certain prejudices of the eye, than upon its rousing certain trains of meditation in the mind, it will show in a moment how many intricate questions of feeling are involved in the raising of an edifice; it will convince us of the truth of a proposition, which might at first have appeared startling, that no man can be an architect, who is not a metaphysician.²

2. To the illustration of the department of this noble science which may be designated the Poetry of Architecture, this and some future articles will be dedicated. It is this peculiarity of the art which constitutes its nationality; and it will be found as interesting, as it is useful, to trace in the distinctive characters of the architecture of nations, not only its adaptation to the situation and climate in which it has arisen, but its strong similarity to, and connection with, the prevailing turn of mind by which the nation who first employed it is distinguished.³

¹ [From *The Architectural Magazine*, vol. iv., 1837 (November), pp. 505–508.]

² [This is the first of many hard sayings in the manner of Plato which Ruskin was to enunciate with regard to the architectural profession. See, e.g. *Lectures on Architecture and Painting*, § 61, “a great architect must be a great sculptor or painter.” A young man once said to Ruskin that he “meant to be an architect.” “I am very glad to hear it,” was the reply; “there are no architects at present.”]

³ [An anticipation of one of the distinctive features in Ruskin's subsequent writings on Architecture; namely, the significance of it as the most trustworthy record of the life and faith of nations. See, for his most concise enunciation of this proposition, the preface to *St. Mark's Rest*.]

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3. I consider the task I have imposed upon myself the more necessary, because this department of the science, perhaps regarded by some who have no ideas beyond stone and mortar as chimerical, and by others who think nothing necessary but truth and proportion as useless, is at a miserably low ebb in England. And what is the consequence? We have Corinthian columns placed beside pilasters of no order at all, surmounted by monstrosified pepper-boxes, Gothic in form and Grecian in detail, in a building nominally and peculiarly national;¹ we have Swiss cottages, falsely and calumniously so entitled, dropped in the brick-fields round the metropolis; and we have staring, square-windowed, flat-roofed gentlemen's seats, of the lath and plaster, mock-magnificent, Regent's Park description, rising on the woody promontories of Derwent Water.

4. How deeply is it to be regretted, how much is it to be wondered at, that, in a country whose school of painting, though degraded by its system of meretricious colouring, and disgraced by hosts of would-be imitators of inimitable individuals,² is yet raised by the distinguished talent of those individuals to a place of well-deserved honour; and the studios of whose sculptors are filled with designs of the most pure simplicity, and most perfect animation: the school of architecture should be so miserably debased!

5. There are, however, many reasons for a fact so lamentable. In the first place, the patrons of architecture (I am speaking of all classes of buildings, from the lowest to the highest), are a more numerous and less capable class than those of painting. The general public, and I say it with sorrow, because I know it from observation, have little to do with the encouragement of the school of painting, beyond the power which they unquestionably possess, and unmercifully use, of compelling our artists to substitute glare for beauty. Observe

¹ [The National Gallery in Trafalgar Square, erected from designs by William Wilkins, R.A., was at this time approaching completion. It was opened to the public in 1838.]

² [An allusion to imitators of Turner; see the "Reply to Blackwood" (1836) in Vol. III.]

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the direction of public taste at any of our exhibitions. We see visitors at that of the Society of Painters in Water Colours,¹ passing Tayler² with anathemas and Lewis³ with indifference, to remain in reverence and admiration before certain amiable white lambs and water-lilies, whose artists shall be nameless. We see them, in the Royal Academy, passing by Wilkie,⁴ Turner and Callcott,⁵ with shrugs of doubt or of scorn, to fix in gazing and enthusiastic crowds upon kettles-full of witches, and His Majesty's ships so and so lying to in a gale, etc., etc. But these pictures attain no celebrity because the public admire them, for it is not to the public that the judgment is intrusted. It is by the chosen few, by our nobility and men of taste and talent, that the decision is made, the fame bestowed, and the artist encouraged.

6. Not so in architecture. There, the power is generally diffused. Every citizen may box himself up in as barbarous a tenement as suits his taste or inclination; the architect is his vassal, and must permit him not only to criticise, but to perpetrate. The palace or the nobleman's seat may be raised in good taste, and become the admiration of a nation; but the influence of their owner is terminated by the boundary of his estate: he has no command over the adjacent scenery, and the possessor of every thirty acres around him has him at his mercy. The streets of our cities are examples of the effects of this clashing of different tastes; and they are either remarkable for the utter absence of all attempt at embellishment, or disgraced by every variety of abomination.

¹ [For Ruskin's reminiscences in later years of exhibitions of the "Old" Water-colour Society, see *Notes on Prout and Hunt*, preface, § 28, and *Art of England*, § 159.]

² [Frederick Tayler (1802-1889), President of the old Water-colour Society, 1858-71. For some criticisms by Ruskin on his works, see *Modern Painters*, vol. i. pt. i. sec. ii. ch. i. § 8, and *Academy Notes* for 1856 and 1858.]

³ [John Frederick Lewis, R.A., 1805-1876. Ruskin's admiration for this painter was great and lasting. See *Academy Notes*, 1855-59.]

⁴ [Ruskin did not in his later works have much to say of Wilkie; but see *Modern Painters*, vol. i. ch. i. § 1 n. In *Lectures on Architecture and Painting* (§ 129) he regrets the change in Wilkie's mid-career from domestic genre to so-called "historical" art. See also *The Two Paths*, Appendix i.]

⁵ [A few years later Ruskin himself passed by Callcott somewhat contemptuously. See *Modern Painters*, vol. i. pt. ii. sec. i. ch. vii. § 18.]

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7. Again, in a climate like ours, those few who have knowledge and feeling to distinguish what is beautiful, are frequently prevented by various circumstances from erecting it. John Bull's comfort perpetually interferes with his good taste, and I should be the first to lament his losing so much of his nationality, as to permit the latter to prevail. He cannot put his windows into a recess, without darkening his rooms; he cannot raise a narrow gable above his walls, without knocking his head against the rafters; and, worst of all, he cannot do either, without being stigmatised by the awful, inevitable epithet, of "a very odd man." But, though much of the degradation of our present school of architecture is owing to the want or the unfitness of patrons, surely it is yet more attributable to a lamentable deficiency of taste and talent among our architects themselves. It is true, that in a country affording so little encouragement, and presenting so many causes for its absence, it cannot be expected that we should have any Michael Angelo Buonarottis. The energy of our architects is expended in raising "neat" poor-houses, and "pretty" charity schools; and, if they ever enter upon a work of higher rank, economy is the order of the day: plaster and stucco are substituted for granite and marble; rods of splashed iron for columns of verd-antique; and in the wild struggle after novelty, the fantastic is mistaken for the graceful, the complicated for the imposing, superfluity of ornament for beauty, and its total absence for simplicity.

8. But all these disadvantages might in some degree be counteracted, all these abuses in some degree prevented, were it not for the slight attention paid by our architects to that branch of the art which I have above designated as the Poetry of Architecture. All unity of feeling (which is the first principle of good taste) is neglected; we see nothing but incongruous combination: we have pinnacles without height, windows without light, columns with nothing to sustain, and buttresses with nothing to support. We have parish paupers smoking their pipes and drinking their beer under Gothic arches and sculptured niches; and quiet old English

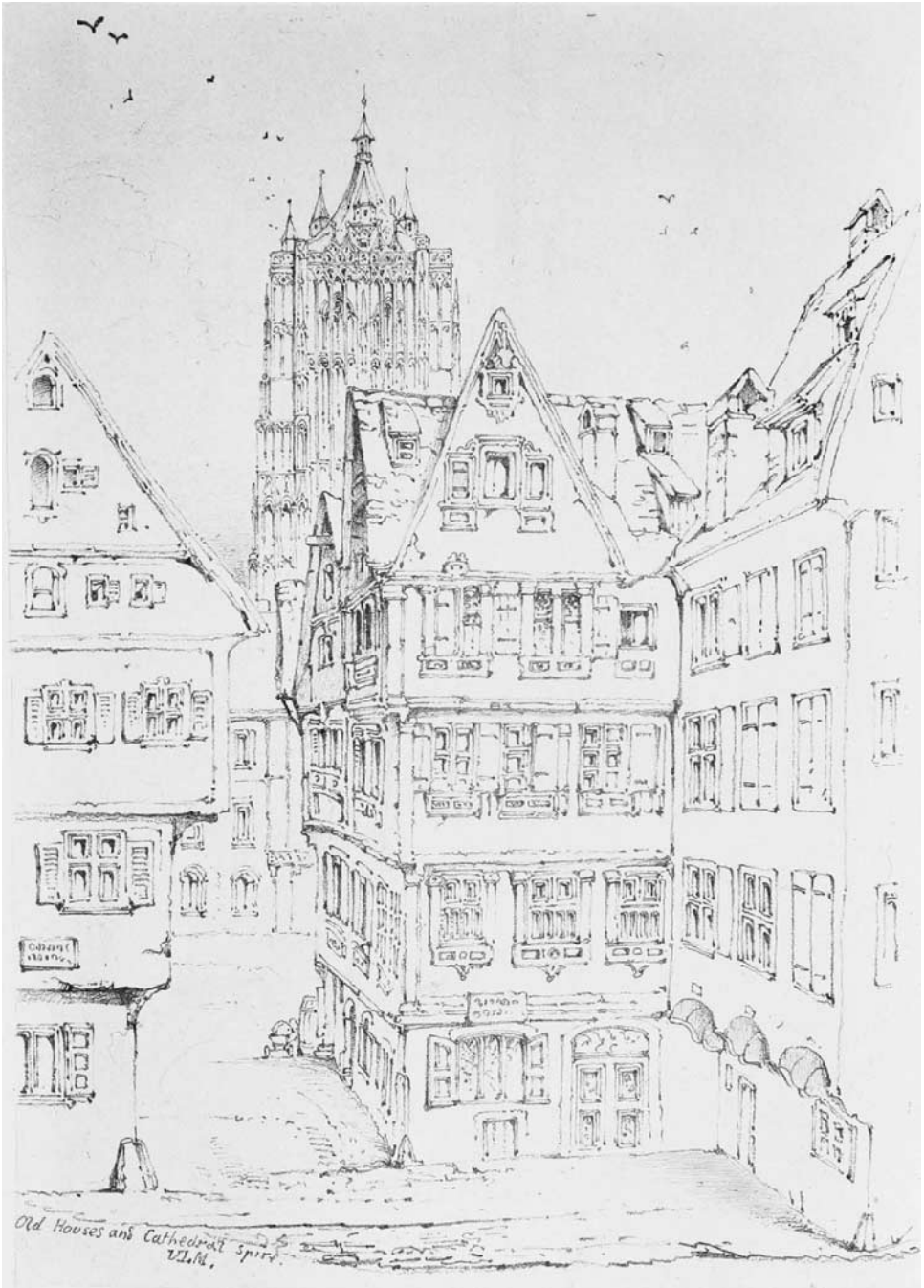
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John Ruskin

Excerpt

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Drawn by J Ruskin

Houses and Cathedral Spire, Ulm.

1835.

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gentlemen reclining on crocodile stools, and peeping out of the windows of Swiss châteaux.

9. I shall attempt, therefore, to endeavour to illustrate the principle from the neglect of which these abuses have arisen; that of unity of feeling, the basis of all grace, the essence of all beauty. We shall consider the architecture of nations as it is influenced by their feelings and manners, as it is connected with the scenery in which it is found, and with the skies under which it was erected; we shall be led as much to the street and the cottage as to the temple and the tower; and shall be more interested in buildings raised by feeling, than in those corrected by rule. We shall commence with the lower class of edifices, proceeding from the roadside to the village, and from the village to the city;¹ and, if we succeed in directing the attention of a single individual more directly to this most interesting department of the science of architecture, we shall not have written in vain.

¹ [The full scheme of the work was, however, not carried out, owing to the stoppage of the *Magazine*; see above, p. xlv.]

PART I

THE COTTAGE

I

THE LOWLAND COTTAGE—ENGLAND AND FRANCE¹

10. OF all embellishments by which the efforts of man can enhance the beauty of natural scenery, those are the most effective which can give animation to the scene, while the spirit which they bestow is in unison with its general character. It is generally desirable to indicate the presence of animated existence in a scene of natural beauty; but only of such existence as shall be imbued with the spirit, and shall partake of the essence, of the beauty, which, without it, would be dead. If our object, therefore, is to embellish a scene the character of which is peaceful and unpretending, we must not erect a building fit for the abode of wealth or pride. However beautiful or imposing in itself, such an object immediately indicates the presence of a kind of existence unsuited to the scenery which it inhabits; and of a mind which, when it sought retirement, was unacquainted with its own ruling feelings, and which consequently excites no sympathy in ours: but, if we erect a dwelling which may appear adapted to the wants, and sufficient for the comfort, of a gentle heart and lowly mind, we have instantly attained our object: we have bestowed animation, but we have not disturbed repose.

11. It is for this reason that the cottage is one of the embellishments of natural scenery which deserve attentive consideration. It is beautiful always, and everywhere. Whether looking out of the woody dingle with its eye-like

¹ [From *The Architectural Magazine*, vol. iv., 1837 (December), pp. 555–560.]

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window, and sending up the motion of azure smoke between the silver trunks of aged trees; or grouped among the bright cornfields of the fruitful plain; or forming grey clusters along the slope of the mountain side, the cottage always gives the idea of a thing to be beloved: a quiet life-giving voice, that is as peaceful as silence itself.

12. With these feelings, we shall devote some time to the consideration of the prevailing character, and national peculiarities, of European cottages. The principal thing worthy of observation in the lowland cottage of England is its finished neatness. The thatch is firmly pegged down, and mathematically levelled at the edges; and, though the martin is permitted to attach his humble domicile, in undisturbed security, to the eaves, he may be considered as enhancing the effect of the cottage, by increasing its usefulness, and making it contribute to the comfort of more beings than one. The whitewash is stainless, and its rough surface catches a side light as brightly as a front one: the luxuriant rose is trained gracefully over the window; and the gleaming lattice, divided not into heavy squares, but into small pointed diamonds, is thrown half open, as is just discovered by its glance among the green leaves of the sweet briar, to admit the breeze, that, as it passes over the flowers, becomes full of their fragrance. The light wooden porch breaks the flat of the cottage face by its projection; and a branch or two of wandering honeysuckle spread over the low hatch.¹ A few square feet of garden, and a latched wicket, persuading the weary and dusty pedestrian, with expressive eloquence, to lean upon it for an instant, and request a drink of water or milk, complete a picture, which, if it be far enough from London to be unspoiled by town sophistications, is a very perfect thing in its way. The ideas it awakens are agreeable, and the architecture is all that we want in such a situation. It is pretty and appropriate; and if it boasted of any other perfection, it would be at the expense of its propriety.

¹ [Compare the description of a typical English cottage, with its "honeysuckle porch and latticed window" and "thatched slope," in *Lectures on Architecture and Painting*, § 16.]

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13. Let us now cross the Channel, and endeavour to find a country cottage on the other side, if we can; for it is a difficult matter. There are many villages; but such a thing as an isolated cottage is extremely rare. Let us try one or two of the green valleys among the chalk eminences which sweep from Abbeville to Rouen. Here is a cottage at last, and a picturesque one, which is more than we could say for the English domicile. What then is the difference? There is a general air of *nonchalance* about the French peasant's habitation, which is aided by a perfect want of everything like neatness; and rendered more conspicuous by some points about the building which have a look of neglected beauty, and obliterated ornament. Half of the whitewash is worn off, and the other half coloured by various mosses and wandering lichens, which have been permitted to vegetate upon it, and which, though beautiful, constitute a kind of beauty from which the ideas of age and decay are inseparable. The tall roof of the garret window stands fantastically out; and underneath it, where, in England, we had a plain double lattice, is a deep recess, flatly arched at the top, built of solid masses of grey stone, fluted on the edge; while the brightness of the glass within (if there be any) is lost in shade, causing the recess to appear to the observer like a dark eye. The door has the same character: it is also of stone, which is so much broken and disguised as to prevent it from giving any idea of strength or stability. The entrance is always open; no roses, or anything else, are wreathed about it; several out-houses, built in the same style, give the building extent; and the group (in all probability, the dependency of some large old château in the distance) does not peep out of copse, or thicket, or a group of tall and beautiful trees, but stands comfortlessly between two individuals of the column of long-trunked facsimile elms, which keep guard along the length of the public road.

14. Now, let it be observed how perfectly, how singularly, the distinctive characters of these two cottages agree with those of the countries in which they are built; and of the people for whose use they are constructed. England is a

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country whose every scene is in miniature. Its green valleys are not wide; its dewy hills are not high; its forests are of no extent, or, rather, it has nothing that can pretend to a more sounding title than that of "wood." Its champaigns are minutely chequered into fields: we can never see far at a time; and there is a sense of something inexpressible, except by the truly English word "snug," in every quiet nook and sheltered lane. The English cottage, therefore, is equally small, equally sheltered, equally invisible at a distance.

15. But France is a country on a large scale. Low, but long, hills sweep away for miles into vast uninterrupted champaigns; immense forests shadow the country for hundreds of square miles, without once letting through the light of day; its pastures and arable land are divided on the same scale; there are no fences; we can hardly place ourselves in any spot where we shall not see for leagues around; and there is a kind of comfortless sublimity in the size of every scene. The French cottage, therefore, is on the same scale, equally large and desolate-looking; but we shall see, presently, that it can arouse feelings which, though they cannot be said to give it sublimity, yet are of a higher order than any which can be awakened at the sight of the English cottage.

16. Again, every bit of cultivated ground in England has a finished neatness; the fields are all divided by hedges or fences; the fruit trees are neatly pruned; the roads beautifully made, &c. Everything is the reverse in France: the fields are distinguished by the nature of the crops they bear; the fruit trees are overgrown with moss and mistletoe; and the roads immeasurably wide, and miserably made.¹

17. So much for the character of the two cottages, as they assimilate with the countries in which they are found. Let us now see how they assimilate with the character of the people by whom they are built. England is a country of perpetually increasing prosperity and active enterprise;

¹ [The contrast here observed between the trimness of English scenery and the picturesqueness of French, was afterwards elaborated by Ruskin in the chapter of *Modern Painters* (vol. iv. ch. 1) which begins with a description of the old tower of Calais church.]