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BRICK AND MARBLE IN THE MIDDLE AGES.

CHAPTER I.

> "Yet waft me from the harbour-mouth,
> Wild wind! I seek a warmer sky,
> And I will see before I die
> The palms and temples of the South."—*Tennyson*.

South-Eastern Railway Company's handbills — Crossing the Channel — Novelties of the French coast — Journey to Paris — The Madeleine — The Invalides — S. Clothilde — Unreality of modern sculpture — S. Geneviève — Notre Dame — The Sainte Chapelle — Parisian art — Strasburg Railway — Bâle — The Rhine.

No doubt all that portion of the world which does not always stop at home remembers the alluring views of Swiss mountains heading the South-Eastern Railway Company's announcements of the fact that Switzerland was to be reached in twenty-six hours from London! And no doubt many, without stopping to think much of the degree of art which characterized the views so generously published to the world, had their attention caught by the announcement, and made up their minds, *faute de mieux*, to try for themselves the amount of truth contained in the advertisement; much as the foolish mechanic who, captivated with the dashing portrait of some imaginary trooper cutting down imaginary foes, goes into a recruiting depôt and binds himself on a voyage, in the service of the "Honourable Company," to the Indies, where, perhaps, he

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finds that, though he never looks exactly like the much-admired cavalier, he is nevertheless dressed in a uniform, and has some real foes to encounter. So he who sanguinely anticipated that in twenty-six hours he might find himself in Switzerland would have been disappointed, but nevertheless would, in as short a time as he could reasonably expect, have been discharged on the borders of that most pleasant land.

Attracted by the aforesaid artistic handbills, I, like many others, was bold enough to take return tickets from London to Bâle and back; nor had I any reason whatever for regretting that I had done so. They allowed me to be absent for six weeks, to travel by any train I chose, and they saved me the trouble—and this is no slight saving—which one always has on foreign railways of getting fresh tickets for every journey. Besides all which recommendations came the weightiest of all—their economy. Our journey to Paris was like most other journeys on that much-travelled road. There was the confidence between London Bridge and Folkestone that "there would be no sea to-day," with which the nervous always attempt in vain to cheer up their drooping spirits; there was the bustle of embarking, and some doubt as to the intentions of that enemy the sea; then there was a marvellous packing up of everybody by everybody else, with plaids, shawls, comforters, and the like; then the word of command; and in a minute, as the little steamer clears the harbour-gates, there comes a squall which throws her over on one side, discharges all the carefully packed-up ladies and gentlemen in a confused sprawl upon the deck, and confirms so decidedly the worst forebodings of the most nervous of the passengers, that perhaps it is best to draw a veil over the remainder of the passage, and to imagine ourselves

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quietly seated in a railway-carriage—comfortable to excess—on our way from Boulogne to Paris.

Perhaps there are no two places on the whole Continent which in every way are worse specimens of continental towns than those two in which Englishmen on their travels generally first set foot—Ostend and Boulogne.

It is difficult to say which is worst, but I incline to give the palm to Boulogne, as being a degree in advance of Ostend in the assertion of a respectability which neither of them in any sense really has.

There is something very novel, and it strikes you as much every time it is seen, in the aspect of everything directly you have crossed the Channel; indeed, I am inclined to think that there is no country in Europe so much as France, and no city, perhaps, so much as Paris, so thoroughly foreign in its aspect and so thoroughly new in all its customs and proceedings. So the dress of every one, not omitting the remarkable development of their trowsers, the female police*men* presenting arms as the train flies by, the *buffets* so common and generally so good, are all quite new. Nor less so the aspect of the country: fields cut up into small strips of a dozen kinds of crops; unprosperous-looking cows, each feeding discontentedly and drearily, tethered to a man or woman on a small patch of grass; corn cut and then stacked in small cocks for a month or two of exposure to the pleasant changes of the atmosphere; and the entire absence of hedge-rows and other trees than poplars, all go to make up a thoroughly un-English picture.

After skirting the coast and its dreary expanse of sand-hills, reminding one very much of those singular sands on the north coast of Cornwall, which are so often shifting about, covering up new churches, or un-

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covering the old oratory of some early British saint, we reach the banks of the Somme, and then travel along a miserably peaty tract of country until the famous west front and short but lofty nave of Abbeville come in view. Thence by a valley (rather more rich than is common in good churches) we continue our race for Amiens. Among these churches I may instance the hipped saddle-back roofed steeples of Picquigny, Hangest, and Pont Rémy, as very valuable examples of their order; that of Picquigny, indeed, surmounting a noble early central steeple, and finished at the top with some delicate open ironwork, is about as graceful a specimen as I know.

At Longpré is another church with a steeple of some pretension, but not satisfactory. It has a perforated spire of stone much too small for the size of the tower, and ungraceful in the extreme.

At Amiens one always longs to stop again to feast ones eyes upon its glorious cathedral, perhaps the noblest and most masculine piece of architecture in the world. But with us this was impossible; our destiny was—come what might—to endeavour at any rate to discharge ourselves in Paris within the promised twelve hours from London: and the dusk of the early autumn evening prevented our having more than the very slightest glimpse of the Minster.

The refreshment-room at Amiens is one of the best I have ever been in—reasonable, clean, and good—and placed just at that happy distance from the sea at which the poor wretches who have been in the depths of woe on the passage begin to recover their presence of mind, and with it of course—as good Englishmen—their appetites; what wonder then if the Buffet at Amiens prospers!

The rest of our journey to Paris was all performed

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in the dark, relieved only by the sight of the then long-expected comet, and it was almost midnight ere we found ourselves settled—how comfortably I say not—at the Hôtel des Princes.

A day in Paris may always be spent pleasantly and profitably; and under the new régime there is certainly no lack of change and improvement in the architectural condition of the city.

It is always pleasant, too, to be able to walk down the Boulevard des Italiens to the Madeleine, and for a few minutes to gaze at a church which certainly presents one very grand idea—that of space—clothed in very gorgeous dress. Moreover, one always feels a certain kind of sympathy for a church in which so many people are ever praying; and I have never yet been into this church without being able to count them by scores. The last time I was at Paris I remember, by the way, being struck here by seeing for the first time a peripteral building made use of. The walls within the columns were hung with rich draperies, and a long procession coming out marched round the circuit of the church between the columns and the walls, and in again at the west door; the effect was, as may be imagined, very striking.

From the Madeleine we went to the Invalides, hoping to see something of the tomb of Napoleon, which is, I believe, just completed; but the church was partially closed, so we were fain to satisfy ourselves with the examination of an altar recently erected in a small apsidal projection from one of the side walls of the nave. The back of the apse was painted light blue as a relief to a kind of apotheosis of some saint, executed in the whitest-looking plaster; the figure, in the worst possible taste, with the light admitted from above, completed the thoroughly thea-

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trical effect of the altar; and the name of the artist, not illegibly written, and in full view, entirely settled all question as to the amount of his self-sacrifice in his pursuit of religious art.

I fear it is too often the case that French arrangements of altars are more likely to remind one of a scene from the Prophète, or some such representation in an opera-house, than of the real dignity of the Christian altar.

From the Invalides we found our way to the new church of S. Clothilde, a large cruciform church now in progress, but approaching completion. Its design is intended to be of early character, but in reality is quite late in its effect; nor do I know when I have seen anything much less successful than the two western steeples rising but a short distance above the nave roof, and looking mean and wasted to a degree. In plan the church is not badly arranged; there is just such a choir as might easily be properly used, and a large space for congregational purposes.

How much we want churches, in this respect at least, somewhat like S. Clothilde, in our large cities in England!

The clerestory of the choir was being filled with stained glass, executed, as I understood, by a Mons. de Marischal. His windows were illustrations of a truth which men are very slow to receive and act upon, viz. that in decorating a transparent material, one whose transparency moreover is the sole cause of its use, we have no right to shade it with dark colours so far as to destroy its brilliancy. These windows were elaborately shaded, and, as a necessary consequence, were heavy and dismal in their effect; besides which, there were most unpleasant mixtures of green, yellow, and ruby, and of ruby and blue, very glaring and very bad.

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The carving of the capitals was, very sensibly, all derived from natural types of foliage, and looked well: but the carving of rather elaborate sculptures of the "Stations" did not please me, having none of the severity of ancient examples. When shall we see a school of sculptors rise able really to satisfy the requirements of the times? I confess I despair more on this point than on any other; for I have as yet seen no fair attempt made to recover the style, or work upon the principles, of the best mediæval sculptors. The work of our modern sculptors is all foreign and unreal, and almost always involves the assumption that they are representing the proceedings of the Greeks or Romans, and not of the English: it is impossible therefore that such a school can be healthy, strong, or successful. It has not been enough considered how much the draperies of different countries always must and will affect the style of sculpture suitable for them. In the north, with our thick woollen garments and warm clothing, no figure, either nude or clothed in muslin, can hope to appeal to the mind of the world at large, except as an unreal representation, which, as unreal, is wondered at and passed by without a thought of love or gratitude.

And if I am told that the art of sculpture in the middle ages was unknown or rude in comparison with its state now, let me refer to some of the modern attempts at its imitation for a proof that this was not the case, as *e. g.* to the recumbent effigy of Archbishop Howley at Canterbury, or to another, of some more humble individual, in the south transept of Chichester Cathedral; a glance at which only, and a comparison with some of the noble mediæval effigies lying in all the stateliness of their repose by their sides, will at once show any one that it is not merely

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necessary to put an effigy upon its back with its hands in prayer in order to vie with the effigies of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The position is much, but not all, and requires very much more skill in its treatment than of late years we have had to bestow.

From S. Clothilde we went first to the pleasant gardens of the Luxembourg—gardens which always make one envious for London—and thence to the recently recovered church of Ste. Geneviève. It has been arranged for service since I was in Paris last year, and is quite worth describing as an illustration of the way in which these things, sometimes at all events, are managed there.

The choir has an altar raised under a baldachin, and there is another, though smaller, in the transept. The choir has stalls, and each angle of the dome is fitted up, one with a pulpit, the rest with seats. All these fittings are of the most trumpery kind; the stalls, pulpit, &c., are mainly composed of canvas painted to imitate wood panelling, whilst the great altar itself is an entire sham, composed of paintings of curtains, marbles, and the like, which vie with each other in the attempt to deceive. To complete the picture, the church is lighted with common moderateur lamps; and one cannot help feeling that, as the Pantheon has been so economically converted into the church of S. Geneviève, so, with equal ease and at small sacrifice, might it again return to its Pagan name and use. One cannot but hope that this may not be, for the scheme for the establishment of clergy, and for their work in connection with this church, was conceived, as I thought at the time, in a fine old missionary spirit.[1]

[1] It is only fair to say that I have since heard that these fittings are said to be temporary, and that a sum has already been granted for the execution of more permanent substitutes. May they be more worthy of their purpose!

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From S. Geneviève we went to Notre Dame, and were amazed to find that the painted imitations of statues still desecrate the long row of niches in the west front. In the interior still more miserable is the taste displayed in the papering of the vaulting of the aisles with blue paper powdered with gold bees. If the effect of the inauguration of Louis Napoleon's reign is not to be more longlived than the papering of Notre Dame, I shall enrol myself in the number of those who trust in a speedy change!

In Notre Dame I always feel more pleasure in looking at the beautiful sculptures behind the stalls of the choir than in anything else. They are a most valuable series, treated in a bold and simple manner; and I am not a little glad that some casts of them grace the prodigious architectural collection which has been gathered with so much zeal and industry to astonish the world at the Crystal Palace at Sydenham.[1]

From Notre Dame all the world goes of course to the Sainte Chapelle, and could we do otherwise than follow so good an example? The turret was just being placed upon the roof, and certainly looked over-lofty and attenuated, and, as far as I could judge through the scaffolding, of latish detail; when seen from the Tuileries it considerably overtops the towers of the cathedral.

One never seems to see any progress inside the chapel; the same porters, above and below, always protest that they cannot admit any one without an order from some distant board of works, but nevertheless always relent conveniently upon the slightest prospect of a fee, so that it is not a very difficult matter to

[1] The architectural museum in Cannon Row has also some casts from these magnificent works.

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gain admission to see what is being done. During the last year the works about the wonderfully delicate baldachin seem to have progressed, but still it is far from being complete; the same man appears to be always busy stencilling in the same place as before, and, except that one or two more windows were finished, and another statue in its place, there really seemed to be no progress since I was last there. When is the chapel to be used at the present rate of going on? and when used, by whom is it to be used? At present it looks as though it were always to be a mere hall, with an altar in its eastern apse, as there is no sign of an intention to have any kind of permanent fittings, and one scarcely sees how they could be introduced.

Altogether I cannot help thinking that the effect upon the mind of what one sees in Paris is very unsatisfactory; the revival of Christian art seems, as it were, to be only skin-deep; and beyond all doubt, were it otherwise, such abominations as the papering of the vaulting of Notre Dame, and of painted statues in its west front, if tolerated at all, would be so for a momentary purpose only, and as an experiment, and would be taken away again directly. The scaffolding, which was just being removed from the avenue leading from the Tuileries to the Barrière de l'Etoile, after having assisted at the fête of Napoleon, was an illustration sufficiently apt of the work which seems to engage the artists of Paris; Parisian fête composers and decorators really appear to be the architects of the day, and of course this fact must militate very much against real art in every branch, as its tendency is to make people accustomed to temporary exhibitions, whose shortcomings are pardoned on the score of their temporary character, and so the artist is lowered in his tone by assisting in the production of works which are not intended—

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