

C O N T R A S T S :

OR,

A Parallel

BETWEEN

THE NOBLE EDIFICES OF THE MIDDLE AGES, AND
SIMILAR BUILDINGS OF THE PRESENT DAY,

&c. &c. &c.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE FEELINGS WHICH PRODUCED THE GREAT EDIFICES OF THE
MIDDLE AGES.

ON comparing the Architectural Works of the last three Centuries with those of the Middle Ages, the wonderful superiority of the latter must strike every attentive observer ; and the mind is naturally led to reflect on the causes which have wrought this mighty change, and to endeavour to trace the fall of Architectural taste, from the period of its first decline to the present day ; and this will form the subject of the following pages.

It will be readily admitted, that the great test of Architectural beauty is the fitness of the design to the purpose for which it is intended, and that the style of a building should so correspond with its use that the spectator may at once perceive the purpose for which it was erected.

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Acting on this principle, different nations have given birth to so many various styles of Architecture, each suited to their climate, customs, and religion ; and as it is among edifices of this latter class that we look for the most splendid and lasting monuments, there can be little doubt that the religious ideas and ceremonies of these different people had by far the greatest influence in the formation of their various styles of Architecture.

The more closely we compare the temples of the Pagan nations with their religious rites and mythologies, the more shall we be satisfied with the truth of this assertion.

In them every ornament, every detail had a mystical import. The pyramid and obelisk of Egyptian Architecture, its Lotus capitals, its gigantic sphynxes and multiplied hieroglyphics, were not mere fanciful Architectural combinations and ornaments, but emblems of the philosophy and mythology of that nation.

In classic Architecture again, not only were the forms of the temples dedicated to different deities varied, but certain capitals and orders of Architecture were peculiar to each ; and the very foliage ornaments of the friezes were symbolic. The same principle, of Architecture resulting from religious belief, may be traced from the caverns of Elora, to the Druidical remains of Stonehenge and Avebury ; and in all these works of Pagan antiquity, we shall invariably find that both the plan and decoration of the building is mystical and emblematic.

And is it to be supposed that Christianity alone, with its sublime truths, with its stupendous mysteries, should be deficient in this respect, and not possess a symbolical architecture for her temples which would embody her doctrines and instruct her children ? surely not,—nor is it so : from Christianity has arisen an architecture so glorious, so sublime, so perfect, that all the productions of ancient paganism sink, when compared before it, to a level with the false and corrupt systems from which they originated.

Pointed or Christian Architecture has far higher claims on our admiration than mere beauty or antiquity ; the former may be regarded as a matter of opinion,—the latter, in the abstract, is no proof of excellence,

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but in it alone we find *the faith of Christianity embodied, and its practices illustrated*.

The three great doctrines, of the redemption of man by the sacrifice of our Lord on the cross ; the three equal persons united in one God-head ; and the resurrection of the dead,—are the foundation of Christian Architecture.

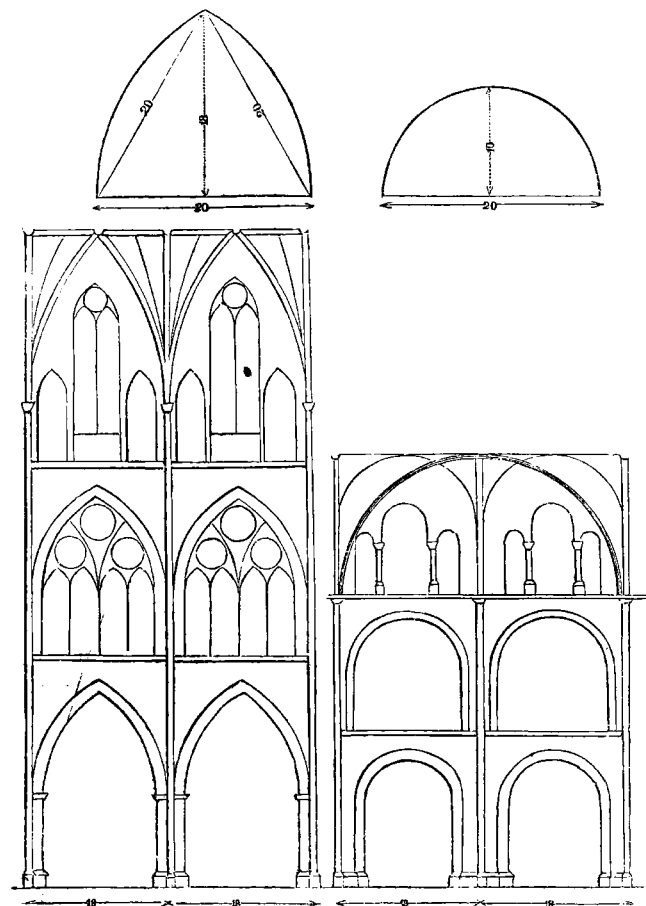
The first—the cross—is not only the very plan and form of a Catholic church, but it terminates each spire and gable, and is imprinted as a seal of faith on the very furniture of the altar.

The second is fully developed in the triangular form and arrangement of arches, tracery, and even subdivisions of the buildings themselves.

The third is beautifully exemplified by great height and vertical lines, which have been considered by the Christians, from the earliest period, as the emblem of the resurrection. According to ancient tradition, the faithful prayed in a standing position, both on Sundays and during the pascal time, in allusion to this great mystery. This is mentioned by Tertullian and by St. Augustine. *Stantes oramus, quod est signum resurrectionis*; and, by the last council of Nice, it was forbidden to kneel on Sundays, or from Easter to Pentecost. The vertical principle being an acknowledged emblem of the resurrection, we may readily account for the adoption of the pointed arch by the Christians, for the purpose of gaining greater height with a given width. I say adoption, because the mere form of the pointed arch is of great antiquity ; and Euclid himself must have been perfectly acquainted with it. But there was nothing to call it into use, till the vertical principle was established. The Christian churches had previously been built with the view to internal height : triforia and clerestories existed in the Saxon churches. But lofty as were these buildings, when compared with the flat and depressed temples of classic antiquity, still the introduction of the pointed arch* enabled the builders to obtain nearly double the elevation with the

* We may consider the introduction of the depressed or four-centred arch as the first symptom of the decline of Christian Architecture, the leading character of which was the vertical or pointed principle.

same width, as is clearly seen in the annexed cut. But do not all the features and details of the churches erected during the middle ages, set



forth their origin, and, at the same time, exhibit the triumphs of Christian truth? Like the religion itself, their foundations are in the cross, and they rise from it in majesty and glory. The lofty nave and choir, with still loftier towers, crowned by clusters of pinnacles and spires, all directed towards heaven, beautiful emblems of the Christian's brightest hope, the shame of the Pagan; the cross, raised on high in glory,—a token of mercy and forgiveness,—crowning the sacred edifice, and placed between the anger of God and the sins of the city.

The images of holy martyrs, each bearing the instrument of the cruel death by which Pagan foolishness hoped to exterminate, with their lives, the truths they witnessed, fill every niche that line the arched recesses of the doorways. Above them are forms of cherubims and the heavenly host, mingled with patriarchs and prophets. Over the great entrance, is the dome or final judgment, the divine majesty, the joys of the blessed spirits, the despair of the condemned. What subjects for contemplation do not these majestic portals present to the Christian, as he approaches the house of prayer! and well are they calculated to awaken those sentiments of reverence and devotion, suited to the holy place. But if the exterior of the temple be so soul-stirring, what a burst of glory meets

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the eye, on entering a long majestic line of pillars rising into lofty and fretted vaulting ! The eye is lost in the intricacies of the aisles and lateral chapels ; each window beams with sacred instructions, and sparkles with glowing and sacred tints ; the pavement is a rich enamel, interspersed with brass memorials of departed souls. Every capital and base are fashioned to represent some holy mystery ; the great rood loft, with its lights and images, through the centre arch of which, in distant perspective, may be seen the high altar blazing with gold and jewels, surmounted by a golden dove, the earthly tabernacle of the Highest ; before which, burn three unextinguished lamps. It is, indeed, a sacred place ; the modulated light, the gleaming tapers, the tombs of the faithful, the various altars, the venerable images of the just,—all conspire to fill the mind with veneration, and to impress it with the sublimity of Christian worship. And when the deep intonations of the bells from the lofty campaniles, which summon the people to the house of prayer, have ceased, and the solemn chant of the choir swells through the vast edifice,—cold, indeed, must be the heart of that man who does not cry out with the Psalmist, *Domine dilexi decorem domus tue, et locum habitationis gloriæ tuæ.*

Such effects as these can only be produced on the mind by buildings, the composition of which has emanated from men who were thoroughly imbued with devotion for, and faith in, the religion for whose worship they were erected.

Their whole energies were directed towards attaining excellence ; they were actuated by far nobler motives than the hopes of pecuniary reward, or even the applause and admiration of mankind. They felt they were engaged in one of the most glorious occupations that can fall to the lot of man—that of raising a temple to the worship of the true and living God.

It was this feeling that operated alike on the master-mind that planned the edifice, and on the patient sculptor whose chisel wrought each varied and beautiful detail. It was this feeling that enabled the ancient masons, in spite of labour, danger, and difficulties, to persevere till they had raised their gigantic spires into the very regions of the

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clouds. It was this feeling that induced the ecclesiastics of old to devote their revenues to this pious purpose, and to labour with their own hands in the accomplishment of the work ; and it is a feeling that may be traced throughout the whole of the numerous edifices of the middle ages, and which, amidst the great variety of genius which their varied decorations display, still bespeaks the unity of purpose which influenced their builders and artists.

They borrowed their ideas from no heathen rites, nor sought for decorations from the idolatrous emblems of a strange people. The foundation and progress of the Christian faith, and the sacraments and ceremonies of the church, formed an ample and noble field for the exercise of their talents ; and it is an incontrovertible fact, that every class of artists, who flourished during those glorious periods, selected their subjects from this inexhaustible source, and devoted their greatest efforts towards the embellishment of ecclesiastical edifices.

Yes, it was, indeed, the faith, the zeal, and above all, the unity, of our ancestors, that enabled them to conceive and raise those wonderful fabrics that still remain to excite our wonder and admiration. They were erected for the most solemn rites of Christian worship, when the term Christian had but one signification throughout the world ; when the glory of the house of God formed an important consideration with mankind, when men were zealous for religion, liberal in their gifts, and devoted to her cause. I am well aware that modern writers have attributed the numerous churches erected during the middle ages to the effect of superstition. But if we believe the great principle of Christian truth, that this life is merely a preparation for a future state, and that the most important occupation of man in this world is to prepare for the next, the multiplicity of religious establishments during the ages of faith, may be accounted for on far nobler motives than have been generally ascribed to them.

It may be objected, and with some apparent reason, that if pointed Architecture had been the result of Christian faith, it would have been introduced earlier. But if we examine the history of the Church, we shall find that the long period which intervened between the establish-

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ment of Christianity and the full development of Christian art, can be most satisfactorily accounted for. When the Catholic faith was first preached, *all art was devoted to the service of error and impurity*. Then the great and terrible persecutions of the first centuries, utterly precluded its exercise among the early Christians. The convulsion consequent on the overthrow of the Roman empire, which destroyed, for a time, all the practical resources of art, was a sufficient cause for the barbarous state of Architecture at that period: but when Christianity had overspread the whole of western Europe, and infused her salutary and ennobling influence in the hearts of the converted nations, art arose purified and glorious; and as it had been previously devoted to the gratification of the senses, then it administered to the soul: and exalted by the grandeur of the Christian mysteries, ennobled by its sublime virtues, it reached a point of excellence far beyond any it had previously attained; and instead of being confined to what was sensual or human, it was devoted to the spiritual and divine. Christian art was the natural result of the progress of Catholic feeling and devotion; and its decay was consequent on that of the faith itself; and all revived classic buildings, whether erected in Catholic or Protestant countries, are evidences of a lamentable departure from true Catholic principles and feelings, as will be shown in the ensuing chapter.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE REVIVED PAGAN PRINCIPLE.

“THE ancient Pagans were at least consistent; in their architecture, symbols, and sculpture, they faithfully embodied the errors of their mythology; but modern Catholics have revived these profanities in opposition to reason, and formed the types of their churches, their paintings, their images, from the detestable models of pagan error which had been overthrown by the triumph of Christian truth, raising temples to the crucified Redeemer in imitation of the Parthenon and Pantheon; representing the Eternal Father under the semblance of Jupiter; the blessed Virgin as a draped Venus or Juno; martyrs as gladiators; saints as amorous nymphs; and angels in the form of Cupids.”—Translated from *De l'Etat Actuel de l'Art Religieux en France*, par M. le Comte de Montalembert. Paris, 1839.

DID not almost every edifice erected during the last few centuries attest the fact, it would hardly be believed, that after Christianity had utterly overthrown the productions of Paganism, with its false doctrines, and when a new and sublime style of art had been generated by its holy and ennobling influence (in all respects suited to its faith and discipline), its professors in future ages would have abandoned this glorious achievement of their religion, to return to the corrupt ideas of pagan sensuality which their ancestors in the faith had so triumphantly suppressed, and, horrible profanation! turn the most sacred mysteries of Christianity into a mere vehicle for their revival.* But every church that has been

* Almost all the celebrated artists of the last three centuries, instead of producing their works from feelings of devotion and a desire of instructing the faithful, merely sought for a display of their art and the increase of fame; hence they not unfrequently selected the least edifying subjects from sacred writ, such as Lot and his daughters, the chastity of Joseph, Susanna and the elders, and many others of the same description, simply because they afforded a better scope for the introduction of pagan nudities; even St. Sebastian was more frequently depicted from this motive, than from any veneration for the constancy of that holy martyr. And what greater profanation could be conceived, than making the representations of the most holy personages mere vehicles for portraits of often very unworthy living characters, who had the audacity to be depicted as saints, apostles, and even as our blessed Lady and the divine Redeemer himself—a detestable practice, of which we have but too many instances, and which

erected from St. Peter's at Rome* downwards, are so many striking examples of the departure from pure Christian ideas and Architecture ; and not only have the modern churchmen adopted the debased style in all their new erections, but they have scarcely left one of the glorious fabrics of antiquity unencumbered by their unsightly and incongruous additions. This mania for paganism is developed in all classes of buildings erected since the fifteenth century,—in palaces, in mansions, in private houses, in public erections, in monuments for the dead ; it even extended to furniture and domestic ornaments for the table : and were it not beyond

form strikingly contrasts to the humble piety of the ages of faith, when the donors of sacred pictures were figured kneeling in a corner of the subject in the attitude of prayer, with their patron saints behind them, and not unfrequently labels with pious inscriptions proceeding from their mouths.

* It is surprising how this edifice is popularly regarded as the *ne plus ultra* of a Catholic church, although as a Christian edifice it is by no means comparable to either St. Peter's of York or St. Peter's of Westminster, in both of which churches every original detail and emblem is of the purest Christian design, and *not one arrangement or feature borrowed from pagan antiquity* ; and although these glorious piles have been woefully desecrated and shorn of more than half their original beauty, they yet produce stronger feelings of religious awe than their namesake at Rome, still in the zenith of its glory, with all its mosaics, gilding, and marbles. As an English author justly remarks, above thirty millions of Catholic money, gathered for the most part in the *pointed cathedrals of Christendom*, have been lavished in the attempt to adapt classic details to a Christian church, the very idea of which implied a most degenerate spirit. St. Peter's, like other buildings of the same date and style, must convey to every Catholic mind the most melancholy associations,—it marks the fatal period of the great schism, and the outbreak of fearful heresy. England—once the brightest jewel in the crown of the Church—separated from Catholic unity ; her most glorious churches dismantled, her religious dispersed, and clergy brought into bondage. France—the kingdom of the saintly Louis—overrun with Calvinists ; her cathedrals pillaged, her abbeys given into the hands of lay rapacity, and the first seeds of the terrible revolution disseminated. Germany, Sweden, Holland, and a great part of the Low Countries, the same. For one religious house founded since that fatal period, five hundred have been dismantled and suppressed ; for one canonized saint, we find a thousand professed infidels ; for one country converted, six lost. These are some of the accompaniments of the grand *renaissance*, or revival of classic art, which moderns so highly extol in preference to the glorious works produced by the faith, zeal, and devotion, of the middle ages ; and such have been the results of the revived pagan system, which began with the classicism of the sixteenth century, was fostered in the mythological palaces of the Grand Monarque, and only attained its climax in the great French revolution, when its principles were fully worked out in the massacre of the clergy, the open profession of infidelity, and the exhibition of a prostitute raised over the altar of God.

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the limits of my subject, I could shew that it has invaded the ordinary forms of speech, and is discernible in modern manners and government.

The most celebrated palaces of Europe are the veriest heathen buildings imaginable; in Versailles, the Tuileries, Louvre, St. Cloud, Fontainebleau, Brussels, Munich, Buckingham Palace, in vain we look for one Christian emblem or ornament. The decoration of garden, terrace, entrance hall, vestibule, gallery, or chamber, ceiling, pannel, wall, window, or pediment, is invariably designed from heathen mythology. Gods and goddesses, demons and nymphs, tritons and cupids, repeated *ad nauseam*, all represented in most complimentary attitudes, with reference to the modern pagan for whom the sycophant artists designed the luxurious residence. In new Buckingham Palace, whose marble gate cost an amount which would have erected a splendid church, there is not even a regular chapel provided for the divine office; so that both in appearance and arrangement it is utterly unsuited for a Christian residence, and forms a most lamentable and degenerate contrast with the ancient Palace of Westminster, of which the present unrivalled Hall was the hospitable refectory, and the exquisitely-beautiful St. Stephen's the domestic chapel.* That was, indeed, a noble structure, worthy of the English monarchs, every chamber of which was adorned with emblems of *their faith and their country*. Conspicuous above the rest were depicted St. George and St. Edward, whose names in moments of desperate peril have oft animated the English in sustaining many an unequal fight

* Few persons are aware of the richness of this once glorious chapel, which must have surpassed in splendour any existing monument of pointed art; the whole of the internal architecture was covered with exquisite paintings and diapering. The Society of Antiquaries have engraved portions of them; in Britton's *History of Architecture*, the lower compartments are faithfully figured.

John Carter has etched sections of the chapel in his *Ancient Architecture*, but his restoration of the roof is incorrect, although, in other respects, the plates give a tolerable idea of this wonderful building. Its great beauties, however, found no favour in the eyes of the semi-barbarians of modern times, who fitted it up for the House of Commons in a style not dissimilar to a methodist conventicle. Still fragments of the ancient elaborate enrichments were to be traced behind the unsightly additions till the great fire utterly destroyed them. Britton and Brayley's *Antiquities of the Old Palace at Westminster*, contains many interesting views of this building as it appeared after the conflagration.