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978-1-108-07418-6 - Tour of a German Artist in England: With Notices of  
Private Galleries, and Remarks on the State of Art: Volume 1

Johann David Passavant

Excerpt

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T O U R  
OF  
A G E R M A N A R T I S T, &c.

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ARRIVAL AND SOJOURN IN LONDON.

WE landed on the steep shores of Dover,  
under as lovely a sun as ever illuminated  
their white cliffs; and having undergone the  
usual formalities of the Custom House and  
Alien Office, proceeded on our way, indulg-  
ing in those varied expressions of surprise,  
admiration and mirth, which the arrival in a  
new country, and more especially in England,  
is sure to elicit from the lips of travellers.

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## 2 ARRIVAL AND SOJOURN IN LONDON.

Our first halting-place was the old town of Canterbury; the road to which lay through lovely wooded meadows, diversified by the numerous hop-grounds which form the chief wealth of the county of Kent. At Canterbury we allowed ourselves the delay of a day, in order to examine at our leisure the celebrated cathedral, which, with regard to art, offers much that is highly interesting.

Perhaps, by way of assistance to the traveller in the inspection of this and other English buildings, a brief sketch of the different styles of architecture of the middle ages, may not be deemed misplaced.

The oldest Christian churches in England were erected during the period of the Saxon sway. They are in the circular style; the same which is called in Germany the Byzantine, but here the Saxon. On comparing them with the Italian religious buildings of a similar style and period, we find the English churches infinitely more uncouth in form and execution: and with the German buildings of

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similar date, especially with the beautiful ecclesiastical edifices on the Rhine, no comparison can be made.

To the above immediately succeeds the so-called transition style; termed in England the Norman, from having been first introduced during that dynasty. A greater delicacy of proportions,—the frequent use of the pointed and intersected arches, and the peculiar ornaments of the time, are the features which more immediately distinguish this from the Saxon. Considered in its proper nature as a transition, it is little more than a mixture of different elements, and can therefore lay no claim to the rank of a distinct style in itself. In Germany, for instance, the churches of Limburg on the Lahn, and of Neuss on the Rhine, give the best idea of what the English designate as the Norman style.

The style falsely termed the Gothic, as characterised by the pointed arch, next presents itself: it was introduced into France and Germany at the beginning of the thir-

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teenth century. The later modifications of it, where the arches frequently pass into straight lines, and in which a profusion of decoration is visible, is termed in England the “Florid Style.”

Between the larger English churches of this kind, and their German cotemporaries, the following distinctions exist. In the former a high square massive tower is generally found rising from the centre of the cross, where the transepts intersect the nave. This tower is usually flat, and without spire; its four corners terminating in ornamented pinnacles, and smaller ones of the same kind rising between them from the centre of each side. The portal, or chief entrance, is made very low and simple, in order to leave space for the great window above. This, in the smaller churches, occupies the whole breadth of front; but in larger churches, which boast two side towers, the space between these towers suffices. An exception to this, however, may be seen in the instance of Peterborough Cathedral, where the whole façade

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forms an open galilee in the pointed style; presenting, as far as I know, a unique specimen of the kind. In Germany and France, on the contrary, one large circular window, or several small ones, are generally found standing together over the door-way.

Among the details of the English buildings of those times, the flat-sided arch forms a very remarkable feature; it is employed for doors, as well as for windows. This form, however, is not agreeable, being out of character with the lofty soaring proportions of this style of building. In the upper portion of the large windows, a prevalence of perpendicular lines presents another peculiarity, which gives the whole a kind of net-work effect.

A further and very singular feature in the English style of building, consists in the battlements, which are found equally on churches, as on fortresses or castles, and are introduced where they obviously have no purpose, except that of ornament. This is even the case in the cathedral of York, the most

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celebrated ecclesiastical edifice in England. On the other hand, the English churches are superior to those of other nations, in the beauty of their vaulted ceilings, which offer as perfect specimens of richness, delicacy, and good taste, as can possibly be produced. The columns supporting the building spread themselves in the form of a fan upwards, are there intersected by circles, and then united in the centre by the pendant ornament, present a most striking appearance.

On surveying the castles, as well as the old country mansions of the middle ages, we find them corresponding, in a great degree, with those of Germany; the balcony in the centre, with the windows grouped, as it were, together, form the only distinction. With the exception of some more important castles, these dwellings are all remarkable for their smallness and uniformity. The English have, however, never quite abandoned the style of the middle ages; and during the last century, have

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greatly improved upon it, in the erection of many castles and country seats.\*

The cathedral of Canterbury stands upon the ancient site of the palace of the Saxon king Ethelbert, who presented the ground to Augustin, the monk who had converted him to christianity, for the purpose of there founding a church and monastery. This primitive edifice, according to the custom which then prevailed in the north, was built of wood; but having suffered severely from the ravages of the Danes, it was, after the

\* A work which gives the most comprehensive view of the state of architecture in England during the middle ages, is that by Thomas Rickman, the architect. "An attempt to discriminate the styles of architecture in England from the Conquest to the Reformation, &c. London, 1825, 3rd edition. Longman and Co." Another excellent work of this kind is by John Britton. "A Chronological List and Graphic Illustration of Christian Architecture in England; embracing a critical enquiry into the rise, progress, and perfection of this species of architecture, &c., with an alphabetical list of architects of the middle ages, &c. London, 1827. Longman and Co."

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Norman conquest, rebuilt by Archbishop Lancfranc, the stones for the purpose being brought from Caen, in Normandy. Under his successor, Anselm, the choir was so embellished with paintings, and other decorations, by the prior Conrad, that this part of the church received the name of the “glorious choir of Conrad.”

In the year 1174, the whole upper part of the church was destroyed by fire; but, in a few years’ time, a more beautiful edifice arose, phoenix like, from its ruins. The expences thus incurred were mainly defrayed by the large receipts arising from the Bull of indulgences, granted to this church in consequence of the martyrdom of the archbishop, Thomas à Becket. A further addition, and one whereby the building was increased to almost double its original size, was made, in 1379, by the erection of the western end, and the central high tower. From that period to the present, the cathedral has remained unaltered in form. The



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subterranean church beneath the old choir, is the only vestige of the ancient building which has descended to the present day. This is very low, resting on small pillars, which branch into arches, similar to those of the tenth and eleventh century in Germany. Here is also a portion of pavement formed of white marble, porphyry, surpentine, and what is called Opus Alexandrinum, in imitation of the Basilica churches at Rome. Such is likewise to be found in other old English churches, as well as in the cathedral at Aix-la-Chapelle. The eastern part of the upper church is one of the most beautiful remains of Norman architecture in England. The nave rests on massive round pillars, in the taste of the twelfth century; these are connected by pointed arches, over which rises the upper part with small pillars of dark marble, three of which united form one column; linked together, as it were, with hoops in the centre of the shafts, and making a colonnade of round arches.

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## 10 ARRIVAL AND SOJOURN IN LONDON.

A splendid stone screen in the gothic style, A. D. 1304, divides the old from the more modern building, and is ornamented with figures of the Saxon monarchs, part of which have been recently restored from old models. Altogether, much has been lately effected in England towards the restoration of its churches and ancient monuments. The lofty vaulted roof of the tower is beautifully coloured, and presents one of the most striking specimens of this kind of decoration, which I have seen in England. Beckett's tomb is still standing, but the bare walls are all that remain: its wealth of gold and jewels having been plundered in Cromwell's time. The monument of the Black Prince, son of King Edward the Third, has, on the other hand, been religiously preserved, with all its interesting accessories of sword, helmet, and shield; as likewise his gold studded armour. His effigy, large as life, lies on a sarcophagus, adorned with his armorial bearings. This very interesting monument was erected in the year 1376, and has