THE CATHEDRAL CHURCHES OF ENGLAND.

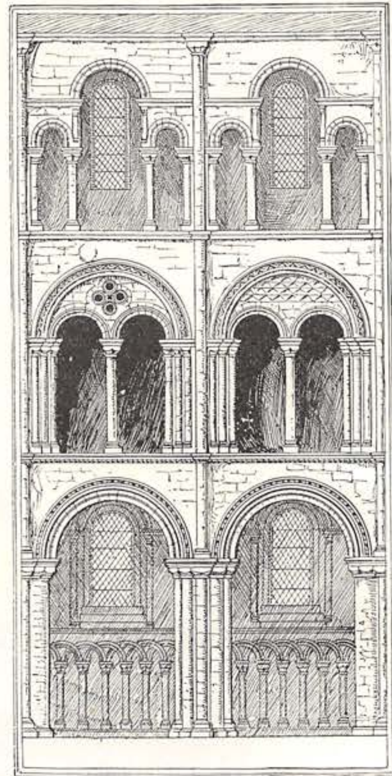
(INTRODUCTORY PAPER.)

I.

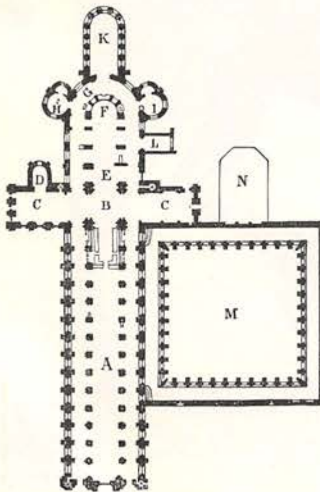
ERTAIN Oriental artists have attained a rare skill in cherry-pit sculpture, and inside the more generous frame of a horse-chestnut shell they can be positively panoramic. I am no fellow-craftsman of theirs to paint the full semblance of England's cathedrals within a scant half-score of chapters.

Nor, were my canvas ever so widely stretched, could I pretend to be qualified for such a task. Historian, social philosopher, architect, ecclesiologist,— all of these he ought to be who would attempt it; and a prose-poet, too, to translate a charm beyond the reach of unwinged words, and to keep true and sensitive tally of those hour-to-hour impressions which may give a reflection of things and facts almost more interesting than their mere portrayal,— showing a vision of ourselves as we should be, touched in our inner fiber by their inmost essence. Truly, if a title were a promise, if in its sound were implied a pledge to exhaust its suggestiveness, I might well be daunted by the sound of mine.

But I recognize no such pledge or promise. I take these very first words to confess myself a mere desultory sketcher with an amateur's outfit. And if, nevertheless, I sit myself down before one of the finest, most complicated, most exacting subjects in the world, I do no more than fall in with the traditional practice of my kind. I know that traditional ridicule attends this practice — often enough have we been told that if angels, for instance, were in our shoes, their methods of advance would be different from ours. Yet we have a very valid excuse to make for ourselves. The angel it is — the divine master with brush or pen — who can take a little subject and make it big with interest. He it is who can manufacture his own charm, evolve his own significance, weave his own poetry out of some dry and small suggestion his outer eye has noted; his weaker brother must depend upon *what* he paints for all the value of the outcome.



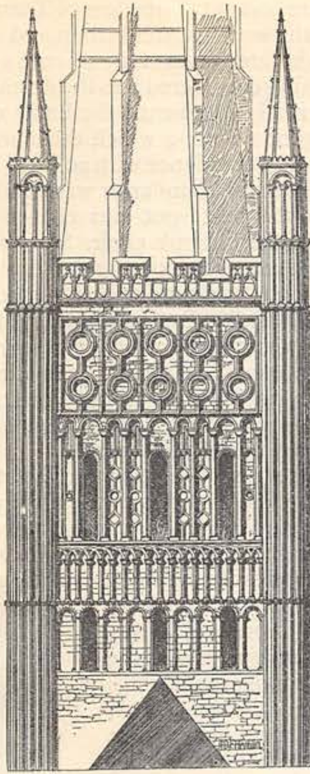
TWO BAYS OF CHOIR, INTERIOR, PETERBOROUGH CATHEDRAL. (NORMAN.)
FROM SHARPE'S "SEVEN PERIODS OF ENGLISH ARCHITECTURE."



PLAN OF NORWICH CATHEDRAL. (NORMAN.)
REDRAWN FROM MURRAY'S "HAND-BOOK TO THE CATHEDRALS OF ENGLAND."

A. Nave. B. Crossing under central tower. C, C. Transepts. E. Constructive choir. F. Apse. G. Eastern aisle. K. Site of Lady chapel (destroyed). D, H, I, and L. Chapels. M. Cloisters. N. Site of chapter-house (destroyed).

Yet I cannot venture here to draw for help upon all the stores in this vast magazine of ready-made beauty and interest. Some ten or a dozen cathedral churches must suffice me, selected from the whole list (which numbers nearly as many as did those delightful pilgrims



TOWER OF NORWICH CATHEDRAL. (NORMAN.)

who once ambled forth from the Tabard Inn to seek the most famous of all), partly because of their greatness as buildings, and partly because of their length and richness of life as cathedrals.

II.

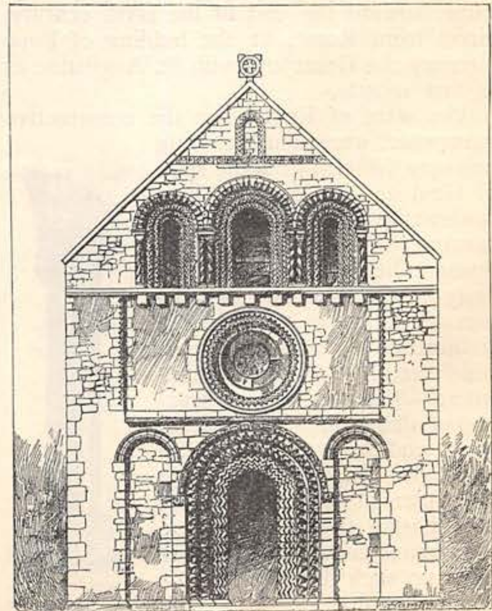
FREQUENT, I imagine, is the misconception which confuses the two claims — which sees in "cathedral" but a synonym for a church-building of the first architectural rank. Architecture has really nothing to do with the cathedral name, nor (and least of all in England) has the greatness of the city in which the building stands. A "cathedral church" is simply a church which is the ecclesiastical center of a diocese, which holds a bishop's official chair, his *cathedra*. With the setting-up of this chair comes the cathedral title; with its removal the title goes: there is no other cause or definition of it. Yet, though size and splendor do not make a church a cathedral church, it is but natural that they should always have seemed inseparable from its being. It is but natural that her churches of highest ecclesiastical rank should be among England's greatest and most splendid.

Among her greatest, I say. Not they alone absorbed the architect's noblest efforts; not in them alone lie petrified the most lavish gifts of hands made generous by piety, or ostentation, or remorseful terror. The mere abbey or collegiate church often equaled the cathedral church in all but dignity of service. Sometimes even this was added unto it at a day long subsequent to its day of birth. Often, on the other hand, it was shattered into splendid fragments under that hammer, curiously called "Reform," with which the sixteenth century warred against monasticism. Yet still at this late moment some of the mightiest fanes in England stand intact. Some of these, however, are beyond the limits of our title. If I name Westminster Abbey only I shall give sufficient illustration.

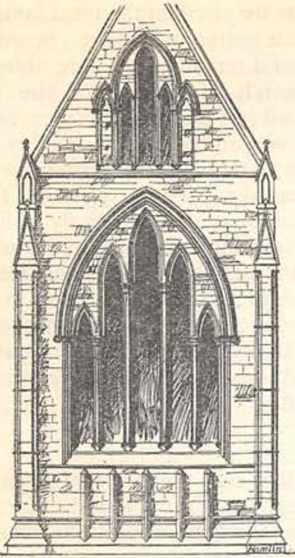
III.

WHEN it is said that least of all in England should we think of a cathedral church as necessarily the chief church in some town chief itself among its neighbors, one hints at facts in which lies fossilized a record of the very first beginnings of English dominion in the land.

The earliest island Church, we know, had not a drop of English blood in its veins, but was British and Roman in a union whose elements we cannot now distinctly balance. When the Romans went and the English came (those Jutes and Saxons and Angles we are used to calling the Anglo-Saxons), their heathen triumph swept Briton and Church away together — not wholly out of the island-world, yet out of most of those districts which are now England proper. However the sparks of



WEST FRONT OF IFFLEY CHURCH. (NORMAN.)

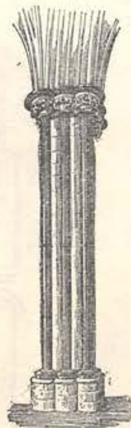


LANCET WINDOWS, CHESTER CATHEDRAL

Christianity may have lingered here, dimmed, confused, and scarce perceived amid British serfs and bondwomen, a Christian *Church* lived on only in Ireland and in those portions of the larger isle which lay beyond the conquered north or bordered on the western sea.

Later on, this elder Church threw out fresh shoots and played a distinct part in the re-evangelizing of the land. But the main influence toward this result, the stock which budded first when the land was a land of Englishmen, and afterward absorbed and assimilated all the potency of the ancient sap, came, toward the end of the sixth century, direct from Rome, at the bidding of Pope Gregory the Great and with St. Augustine as its first apostle.

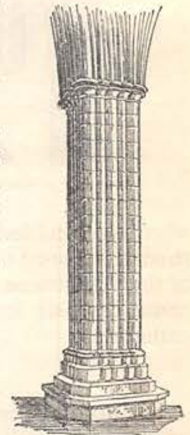
The state of England in the constructive times which were then beginning was very different from the state of Gaul or Italy or the Rhine lands at the time when their still-existing Churches had been given coherence of form and fixity of feature. The destruction of Roman or semi-Roman civilization — wreck and ruin which had had no parallel elsewhere — had meant the destruction of all but a few of the larger towns and the establishment of a number of petty rulers who were rulers of *tribes;* who, so far from basing their authority on preëxisting civic authority, had often no such thing as an even nominal capital.



CLUSTERED COLUMN, WORCESTER CATHEDRAL. (EARLY ENGLISH.)

So when the first English bishoprics were laid out (Theodore of Tarsus doing much of the work as Archbishop and agent of Rome in the later years of the seventh century), the first thing considered was the demarcations of these tribal settlements, the limits of those little kingdoms among which the land was divided up. In accordance with political boundaries ecclesiastical boundaries were laid down; and then the best spot was chosen for the planting of the bishop's chair. Sometimes the choice fell naturally upon one of the few remaining great ancient burghs — as on London, as on York. But sometimes it fell on a town like Canterbury which had never been very conspicuous before, and sometimes perforce upon one of those isolated ecclesiastical foundations which missionary hands had set and watered in the wilderness.

Of course the voice of time did not always indorse the first selection of the early planner. With changing conditions came many changes of cathedral station, as when certain southern sees, defenseless in their rural isolation against the Danish devastator, were shifted to more easily protected spots; as when the Norman conqueror used his strong hand, and the Church of England proved as plastic as the State beneath it. But many of the cathedrals still stand where they stood at first, and the aspect of all, looked at collectively, is characteristic in the extreme.



CLUSTERED COLUMN, EXETER CATHEDRAL. (EARLY ENGLISH.)

Total is its unlikeness to the general aspect of the cathedral churches of those continental lands where a multitude of cities had held dominion over their encircling districts for centuries before Christianity was preached. There naturally it was first preached to these cities, first accepted by their indwellers; and naturally they absorbed the new ecclesiastical in addition to the old temporal supremacy. French dioceses still follow the lines of Roman districts, and their present cathedral towns are the ancient Roman centers. Even in the etymology of *pagan* we can read the history of continental Christianizing.

But north of the Channel there were no such great municipal entities, neither in the earliest English times nor at any time thereafter. Long-divided as was the realm, it was never split up between rival towns; torn asunder as it often has been since, no part has ever been the prize of civic duels. And these facts and their still persisting influence upon English life and sentiment speak very

FOLIAGE, WELLS CATHEDRAL. (EARLY ENGLISH.)

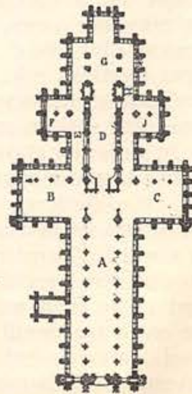
clearly through the voice of the cathedral churches, despite the Conqueror's efforts to bring about a state of things more like the one he knew at home, and despite that general modern impulse toward centralization from which even England has not been wholly free. If, for example, it is true that one of the new bishops of our day has had his chair set for him in the great town of Manchester, he has been given a still younger brother at Southwell and another at St. Albans — two spots where not the town at all but the great old church-building only can seem to continental eyes to deserve the cathedral name.

And thus the cathedrals of England show not merely a general unlikeness to their foreign rivals but also a marvelously delightful diversity among themselves. Now we find St. Paul's of London and the great minsters of Lincoln and of York standing in towns which were great at the dawn of history and show relics of an art much older than their own. Again, as around the towers of Durham or the spire of Salisbury, we see a town that now has considerable size and independent dignity, but which owed its first beginnings, and still visibly confesses the indebtedness, to the setting-up of its *cathedra*. And yet again there are cathedral cities* — Ely and Wells are the extreme examples — that are but little parasitical growths around the base of the church; whose life lives only, even in our day, in the life of the great fane itself.

Not holding some strong military position, not rising close above the steep steps of the roofs of a city, not pressed close about by the homes of laymen and the crowds of street and market-place, stand those English cathedrals which are most purely and typically English in expression; but set about with great masses of foliage and swept about by wide peaceful lawns, the very norm and model of England's greenery — telling, however, by the fragmentary walls and crumbling gateways which keep distant guard about them, that after all they were not built in such piping times of peace as ours. Even when the church does not stand in the most typically English manner, still it is charming to see how its expression will not wholly give the lie to national characteristics. Even St. Paul's has some shreds of dusty foliage to show, and though the huge façade of Lincoln looks out on a small paved square, and though our first glimpse of York shows us the long south side through the narrow perspective of a street in the oldest and densest portion of the town, even so as we turn the mighty shoulder we find the broad, grassy spaces which prove we are in England still. Therefore, there is one thing quite indisputable: we may do as we like across the Channel, but an English pilgrimage must be made with the tree in leaf and the sward in flower.

IV.

WHEN in the earlier ages a cathedral was established, it became (in a far truer sense than it remains in our own day) the hearth and focus of the religious life of its district. It needed a large staff of clergy specially devoted not only to the services within its walls but to the general work of the diocese; specially charged and enabled to be the bishop's helpers as those could not be who were parish priests with definite local duties of their own. In a large town this staff of clergy,



PLAN OF SALISBURY CATHEDRAL. (EARLY ENGLISH.)
REDRAWN FROM MURRAY'S "HAND-BOOK TO THE CATHEDRALS OF ENGLAND."

A. Nave. B, C. Great transepts. D. Choir. F, J. Smaller transepts. G. Lady chapel. (Cloisters not shown.)

* Accurately speaking, a "city" in England is any cathedral town however small, and no other town however great. Such an interpretation sounds oddly in our ears; but interestingly if we may explain it — I have no idea whether we really may or not — as reflecting, in a faint verbal mirror, that continental state of things to which reference already has been made.

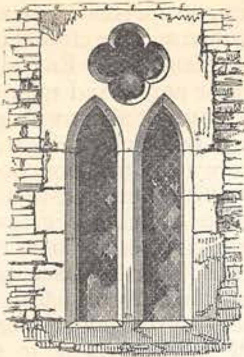


PLATE TRACERY, LILLINGTON CHURCH.
FROM THE IMPERIAL DICTIONARY.

this cathedral "chapter," scarcely needed definite creation. But in England the peculiar circumstances I have tried to explain naturally brought about an intimate union between the cathedral establishment and some great collegiate or monastic body. Sometimes a body of this sort was formed to meet the cathedral's need; but often its prior existence was the fact which dictated the position of the local bishop's chair.

The union once accomplished, both parties waxed great by mutual aid. The "house" was ennobled by the episcopal rank of its head; the bishop's arm was strengthened by the wealth and influence of the house; and the great edifice was the work and the home and the glory of both alike.

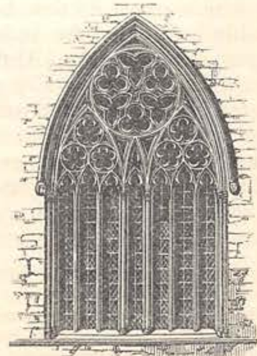
In some cases, I say, the cathedral chapter was collegiate and in some cases was monastic. That is, its members were sometimes mere "secular" priests, bound by no vows save those which all priests assumed, living as members of a collegiate foundation but not living in common, each one having his own individual life and home — which often meant in earlier times his own lawful wife and children; and again they were monks, were bound by monastic vows, were called "regulars" because they lived in common according to some monkish rule.

I need not try to note the way that many chapters were meddled with in many ages according as those in authority above them gave personal preference to the monkish or to the "secular" life. But the interference of the Reformation has left its traces in a nomenclature which demands a word of explanation. The merely collegiate chapters were allowed by the Reformers — that is, by their mighty master Henry — to live on in a generally unchanged condition. Catholic priests eventually became Protestant clergymen, and thereby their functions and their lives were largely altered; but the chapter as such was not annihilated, and so a cathedral which has a chapter of this sort is known to-day as a cathedral "of the Old Foundation." But it went harder with the monkish chapters. These were dissolved and done away with in the clean sweep which Henry made of all monastic things. With one or two exceptions, due to the abolition of the see itself, they were reorganized with new blood in quite another shape; and here and there fresh sees were established with their Protestant bishops, deans, and canons. A cathedral whose history reads thus is to-day, by contrast, "of the New Foundation."

So, we see, a cathedral of the New Foundation is not of necessity new as regards the building or even as regards the cathedral title. It may be a church as old as Peterborough or as Gloucester, each of which was but an abbey church until the sixteenth century. Or it may be a cathedral which has held its rank since such rank was first given in its district — may be Rochester or Worcester, may be Canterbury even, the hoary mother-church of all. "Old" and "New" are used of the constitution of the chapter only.

I am sorry to dwell so long in dusty definitions. But they will be picturesquely illustrated by and by through things whose interest we should wholly miss but for some such little reading of ecclesiastical history. As we pass from one cathedral to another we shall see how great, how radical, how delightful to the eye are the architectural differences that have resulted from the former existence here of secular canons, a collegiate chapter, and there of regular canons, a monastic chapter. And the general fact that such chapters existed in so dignified an estate, in so intimate a union with the episcopal seat, is another great cause of the general difference in aspect between the English cathedrals and their sisters over-sea.

I have told of the wide, lordly spaces in which they most often stand — showing that they were first and the cities only second and subordinate in importance. But within these



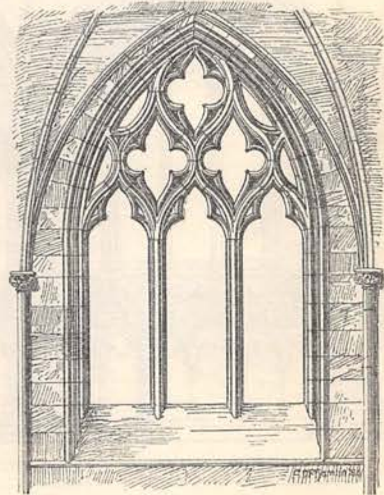
GEOMETRICAL TRACERY, RIPON CATHEDRAL.
FROM THE IMPERIAL DICTIONARY.

spaces they did not stand in self-centered isolation, in grave hierarchic solitude, but side by side with the homes of those who served their altars and labored for their interests and dispensed their bounty and swung their spiritual, and sometimes, too, their temporal, sword; side by side with chapter-houses and dormitories and cloisters and refectories and libraries, with schools and infirmaries and bishops' palaces and canons' dwellings; yes, and with warriors' castles too. There is scarcely a variety of mediæval architecture whose traces we may not study while keeping a narrow path from one of England's cathedral gateways to another, scarcely one from the most gorgeously ecclesiastical to the most simply domestic, most purely utilitarian, most frankly military. And the fact is characteristically English; no cathedral series elsewhere is so all-embracing, so infinitely diversified. There is nothing on the continent which parallels the wide, green, shaded acres in which Salisbury, for example, first appears to us, and there is nothing which matches the palace beyond, set in its fairy-land of garden. There is nothing abroad, with a great cathedral church as its central feature, which reveals the cloister-life of the middle ages as do the ruins of the monastic establishment at Canterbury—ruined because it *was* monastic; or which reveals the collegiate life of the same period as does the marvelous group of still-existing homes at Wells—still existing because they were *not* monastic.

V.

Not so wholly as in continental lands does the history of ecclesiastical architecture in England mean the history of large and sumptuous or city churches. England has in her myriad rural parish churches a treasure nowhere equaled. Yet it is of course to her greater structures we must look if we would see the high-water mark of her artistic current. The lowlier the task, the lowlier the talent that may achieve success. If she had never built aught else than her parish churches, uniquely lovely though she made them, she would have confessed herself out of the race with the great building-nations of the mediæval world. It is to her cathedrals and abbey churches we must look (just here, as I have said, to her cathedrals only), if we would see how age by age she kept pace with these.

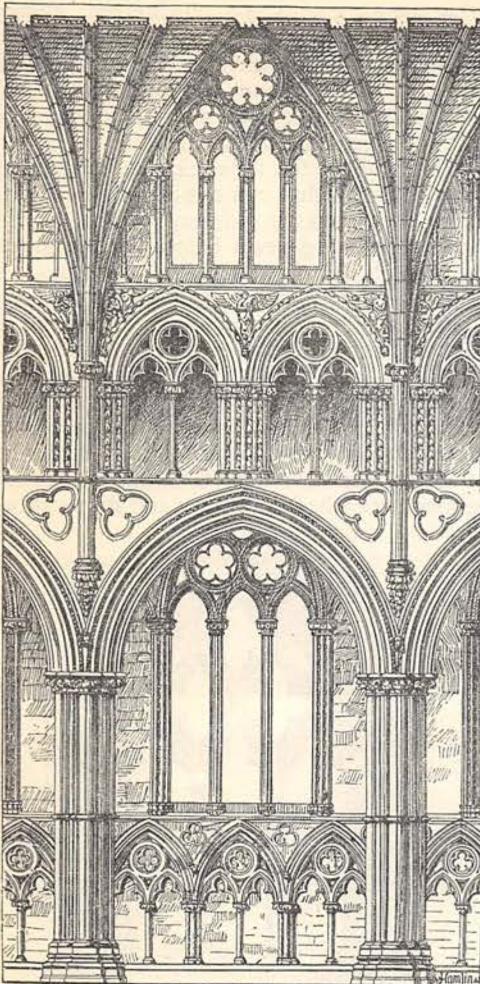
Almost every step of her development may be read in them. The only blank that occurs is at the very beginning; the only lack is of ante-Norman relics. And even this blank is due, not to any want of early effort with the higher problems of the art, but in part to Danish torches and in part to a later (and what may seem to us a misdirected) energy of reconstruction. When architecture was a vital art, growing from year to year, developing from hand to hand, altering logically and inevitably to meet each new requirement, to suit each generation's novel taste, there was small reverence felt for work that was out of date, for work that was out of touch with the current time alike in practical and in æsthetic ways. For long years before the Conquest there had been cathedral churches in England, large and stately, we may believe, and insularly individual. But they melted like snow beneath the hand of that Norman in whose virile soul zeal for religion and love for building were as potently developed as rage for battle, dominion, and earthly pelf. Standing though they sometimes do on sites that have been cathedral sites from the dawning of Christianity, not one among the cathedrals of England shows above



FLOWING TRACERY, WELLS CATHEDRAL. (DECORATED STYLE.)

the level of the soil a stone of its pre-Norman predecessor. The architectural history of England, as her cathedrals show it, begins with the coming of the Norman. But thence it may be traced through every age of arched construction down to that of the classic revival. And this age, too, fortunately found its best expression—left what is not so much a type as the one only splendid flower of English Renaissance effort—in the cathedral of St. Paul in London. With it our series will come to a full stop, and for our purpose there will be in the subject no break, no gap, which might profitably be filled. English architecture, truly to be so called, comes itself to a full stop with this last of its cathedral churches.

The style the Normans brought with them from the continent (it began to come a little earlier than the Conquest, with the Norman



ONE BAY OF THE "ANGEL CHOIR," INTERIOR, LINCOLN CATHEDRAL. (DECORATED STYLE.)

influx to the Confessor's court) was a development, proper to themselves, of that round-arched, "Romanesque" manner which was the common inheritance from Rome of all western Christendom. The so-called "Saxon" style which it displaced, as we know from still-existing small examples, was a more primitive branch of the same common stock; more primitive, not only because it was wrought with a ruder hand, but because it showed less divergence from the early Christian pattern of the south.

It was displaced, I say, by its Norman sister, but not suddenly and for a time not entirely. Even long after the Conquest the old English manner seems to have guided in lowly structures and remote localities; and its influence somewhat modified even the largest and most nobly placed. Insular Norman work is very like continental Norman, but it is not quite the same.

That cruciform ground-plan which had been unknown in any land in the very earliest ages of the Church, was already well established when William crossed the sea. Our cut on page 724 of the plan of Norwich (which has suffered less alteration than any other Anglo-Norman cathedral) will show its principal features,— the long nave with its aisles to right and left, the transepts forming the arms of the cross, and the choir forming its upper, and always its eastern, extremity. This was the plan of a large church in the eleventh century; and it survived through all later ages, essentially the same, though with modifications that were nowhere so boldly made as on English soil.

In our second illustration we see the interior design of a great Norman church,— the pier-arches supported by massive piers or pillars marking off nave from aisle; then the triforium-gallery above; and then the upper range of windows standing free above the aisle roofs and called by the expressive name of clerestory.

With the roof the first insular peculiarity reveals itself. In the eleventh century the Norman church at home was roofed throughout with vaults of stone; but the Anglo-Norman had its wide central spaces covered by a flat wooden ceiling. Vaults were used only above its narrower aisles.

Should we lay this divergence to timidity, to the mechanical incompetence of those native workmen who must have labored for the foreign artist? Perhaps; but perhaps more truly to a strange incorporation of tastes native to the soil. For a love of wooden ceilings was ever after singularly characteristic of the island architect. Though he could not but yield largely to the nobler titles of the vault, yet he often simulated the stone forms of this with wood; and in the very latest and, mechanically speaking, cleverest days of Gothic art he frequently built instead a highly decorated open timber roof — not, it is true, in his greatest churches, but in his smaller ones and in his vast and splendid civic halls.

The exterior of a Norman cathedral was very long and comparatively low, its outline diversified by the semicircular eastern apse, by a great square tower above the crossing of nave and transepts, and usually by two smaller towers flanking the western or entrance front. Norwich is the only cathedral which keeps its Norman central tower unaltered; and no crowning spire of so remote a date survives.

The great tower was open to the eye as a "lantern" far above the level of the other ceilings, and the four huge angle-piers and tremendous arches which sustained it both relieved and emphasized the long perspective. Ornament was more profuse in the later than

in the earlier periods of the style, but was always more profuse in smaller structures than in the very greatest. Though the fact seems curious at first, is it not in truth quite sensible? Are not vast proportions, structural features on a magnificent scale, so effective in themselves that they have comparatively little need of superficial decoration? The doorways were the most highly ornamented features. Here rude but picturesquely "telling" figure-sculpture and thickly woven leaf-like designs mingle often in rich luxuriance. And though within the building the strong capitals and vast arches are sometimes severely plain or are emphasized with sculptured patterns that are simple, primitive, almost barbarically bold and few,— great zigzags and billet-moldings cut, in the earlier examples, with a mere clever hatchet and not a chisel even,— we must not forget that the whole interior, now scraped to stony whiteness, was originally plastered and covered with designs in color.

VI.

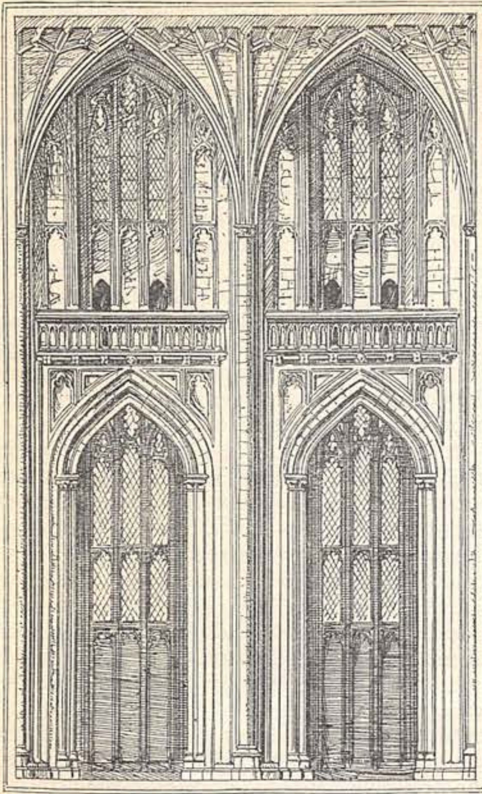
BUT if even Norman work had its insular peculiarities, these were far more strongly marked when, with the dawn of the thirteenth century, the round arch gave place to the pointed, and what the world with obstinate incorrectness call "Gothic" architecture started on its splendid course. The why and the how of the advent and adoption of the pointed arch could hardly be discussed just here. Nor can we pause over the vexed question whether in England or in France was seen the first "complete" development of the style it ruled. The word "complete" admits of too many interpretations dependent for their understanding upon a knowledge of too many details. It is sufficient to say that though in France * without a doubt the pointed arch was first coherently and consistently used to the exclusion of its rival, and though the idea of its use came without a doubt from France to England, yet England's first expression of the new idea, first development of the new system, was singularly logical and complete and singularly individual too. So different indeed was her early treatment of the pointed arch from its early treatment elsewhere, and from her own later method (which was far less individual), that she may fairly claim to have one style more to show than any other land. Her "Lancet-pointed" or "Early English" style stands, lovely and perfect, midway between that Norman and that full-blown Gothic which, on the mainland, passed into each without any such clearly marked halting-place between. England, that is to say, developed a perfect pointed style before she ever essayed to use the *window tracery* which elsewhere was attempted almost from the very first. In the beginning she built her pointed windows very tall and slender, and grouped them together in diverse ways without actually uniting them as the traceried lights of the typical Gothic opening. It is true that Lancet windows were used in other lands, but nowhere as they were used in England — nowhere so variously, so magnificently, so exclusively as the ruling features of a style which was perfectly balanced, perfectly homogeneous, perfectly distinct from the next to follow. Lancet windows there were in other lands — but no true Lancet style.

All proportions, all features, now grew in height and slenderness. The massive round or rectangular pier became lighter and was set about with smaller shafts, in more or less intimate union, to form a reed-like group. The capital abandoned its square top or abacus for a circular one. The chisel showed a marvelous new skill and a wholly different choice of motive in the infinitude of deep-cut moldings which defined the graceful outline of the arch, and in the crown of quaint, non-natural, but lovely curling leaves which was set about the capital. And the pointed vault replaced the primitive flat wooden ceiling, the aspiring lines of the supports finding their completion in its ribs.

Conspicuous too with the advent of the thirteenth century is the alteration of the ground-plan. In the first place the eastern arm of the cross becomes much longer. This change — a characteristically English one — is the architectural expression of the growth of saint and relic worship. No great "house" was so poor in history but that it could supply some local sainted founder, patron, bishop, martyr, when the popular love of pilgrimages was at its height; and none was so blind to the chance of spiritual profit and temporal wealth and glory but that it could perceive the obligation to give him noble sepulcher. The crypt beneath the choir had sufficed in earlier days; but now behind the high altar in the choir itself his bones were laid in greater state, his relics shown in a more splendid pageant, and his miracles performed in presence of far vaster throngs of worshipers. And thus the eastern arm was obliged to stretch itself out to a length which has of course become wholly useless under the changed conditions of our unemotional time.

When speaking architecturally we can hardly help always calling this eastern arm "the choir." But in Norman days it did not hold the true choir, the "ritual choir," the place set apart for

* When I say France of course I do not mean Normandy. It was the Ile-de-France, the *domaine royal*, which led the world's advance in pointed architecture.



TWO BAYS OF NAVE, INTERIOR, WINCHESTER CATHEDRAL. (PERPENDICULAR STYLE.)
FROM SHARPE'S "SEVEN PERIODS OF ENGLISH ARCHITECTURE."

those who performed the complicated choral service. This true choir was a fenced-in space beneath the lantern, extending sometimes far into the nave, and closed to the westward — closed off from the lay congregation — by a massive screen. Beyond this ritual choir, in the short east limb, the "constructive choir," was the presbytery for the higher clergy, the sanctuary and high altar. Such arrangements occasionally persisted even down to the most recent day. But usually, at one Gothic period or another, the screen was moved back till it stood between the angle-piers beyond the transepts; the singers' inclosure, with its rows of stalls, stretched further eastward from pillar to pillar, leaving the aisles free on either hand; and the ritual choir became a part of the constructive.

An English impulse it was which then sometimes threw out a second, smaller pair of transepts eastward of the larger — perhaps to give fresh architectural voice to the ritual distinction between choir and presbytery. The long east limb and these doubled transepts show in our plan of Salisbury (p. 727); and there we see still another English innovation and a most important one. The circular termination — the apse — with which the Norman finished the eastern limb, and often the transept ends as well, was retained, only altered into polygonal shapes, all through the middle ages in all continental countries. But already in the early thirteenth century it was abandoned in England in favor of a flat east end with great groups of lofty windows; and this device (the windows varying of course) was ever after as persistent, as characteristic in England as was the apse elsewhere.

Whither are we to look for the explanation of so marked a difference in times when no nation built in self-contained privacy, but each helped the other with ideas and inventions and often with exported artists too? Doubtless, once more, to the singular persistence of ante-Norman tastes; to the singular strength of preferences native to the soil, inherent in the air, suppressed so long as the dominating Norman was still an alien in the land but ready to reappear so soon as his acclimatizing had been brought about. And if we may believe the logical-seeming deductions of certain careful students, this ante-Norman influence was ante-English even; the true first-birth of the flat east end must be looked for in those little Irish chapels which are the only relics in the whole island realm of the days when the whole island Church was *British*.

A love of longitudinal rather than of lateral extension was very marked in the English builder. It showed itself not only in the unusual length of the choir, but also in the fact that beyond this choir he almost invariably built out further chapels of no inconsiderable size. "Lady chapels" they were most often — dedicated to that Holy Mother whose cult, like that of all lesser saints, received so potent an impulse in the twelfth century. Sometimes they are of the full height of the choir itself, forming part and parcel of its fabric proper. But more often they are lower buildings, into which we look through the main arches of the flat choir end, but above the roof of which this end rises far aloft with its vast windows and its gable finishing the true body of the church. But, as we see again from the plan of Salisbury, all the minor terminations are flat as well as the main one. The apse has disappeared altogether, only to be resuscitated now and then in works where foreign influences guided.

VII.

GRADUALLY — nay, rapidly, in less than a century — the Lancet-pointed gave place to the full-blown Gothic, commonly, but not very sensibly, named in England the "Decorated" style. Window tracery was now developed,

passing through its successive stages as "plate" and "geometrical" and "flowing"; and the sculptor went more directly to nature for the more varied patterns of his leafage. Now, as I have hinted, the scheme of the island architect was very nearly that of his foreign brother. But his peculiar ground-plan preserved its difference, and in certain matter of proportion and of exterior feature (as we shall see hereafter) in this as in every epoch he was markedly himself.

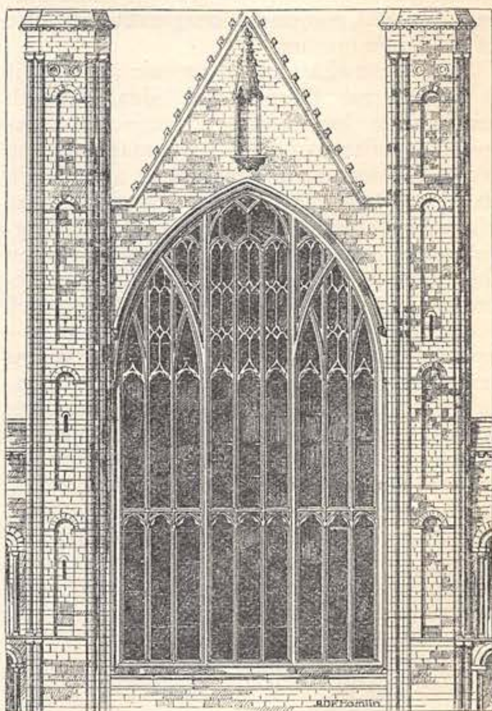
And when the purest time of flowering was over, when each great building nation entered upon a period which, though still vigorous, though still admirable, and indeed more luxuriant than any other, was nevertheless a period of incipient decline and in a certain sense of exaggeration and a pushing to extremes, then the English architect became again more wholly individual in mood; then, in truth, insular peculiarities were more strongly marked than ever in the past.

Late French Gothic became incomparably exuberant and unfettered — twisted and wove its window traceries, for instance, into such flame-like, wavy, stone-denying forms (see cut, page 734) that its name, *Flamboyant*, is picturesquely lucid. But late English Gothic stiffened into a fashion which is just as excellently termed *Perpendicular*.* The mullions of its windows almost abandoned their curves and were cut across by strong horizontal transoms; and the panel-like forms thus produced were carried over as superficial decorations upon the wall spaces between. And while in both countries the arch was taking on a wide variety of complex shapes, its most characteristic shape in France was the reversed or "ogee" curve and in England the low "four-centred"— the former somewhat over-free, the latter some what over-rigid in expression.

VIII.

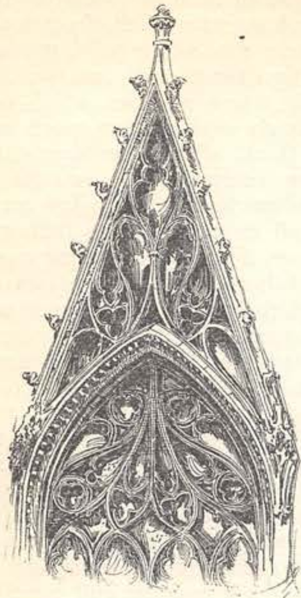
In the contrast of these two styles — produced at that late day when art was least reserved, least temperate, most individual and willful and therefore most perfectly expressive of national prepossessions, of local aspirations, gifts, and failings — we seem to see in English work what may be called architectural prose and in French work architectural poetry. The prose is very sensible and very clever and often extraordinarily majestic; supremely scientific in construction and in its details very gorgeous. But it is without that indefinable accent of purely æsthetic feeling which breathes from the poetry of France — seductive, imaginative, full of passion and fire, though now run a little wild, grown a little over-daring, over-fanciful, and freakish.

And the same qualities which come out most strongly in this latest epoch somewhat mark, I think, all the developments which had gone before. There is nothing more entirely characteristic of English architecture through all its many phases than its *love of lowness;* or, if this be too strong a phrase, its neglect of those magnificent effects of interior height which French Gothic loved more than aught besides. That love of wooden ceilings which reappeared from time to time may perhaps be taken as a sign and symbol of that love for *low* ceilings which persisted always, no matter what the forms and material used, and was paralleled by a love for low-pitched roofs above. In this national instinct against extreme elevation (extreme elevation meaning, of course, very daring constructive processes), we seem to read signs of a national spirit of caution and self-restraint and practical common sense — a trifle prosaic, I say, in quality — as incarnate in the English architect; a spirit



"PERPENDICULAR" WINDOW, WEST FRONT, NORWICH CATHEDRAL. (INSERTED IN NORMAN WALL.)

* Here we find the converse of the facts I noted with regard to Lancet features. Flamboyant windows may be seen in England's Decorated work, but she never used a homogeneous Flamboyant style. On the other hand, there is nothing away from her shores which at all resembles her Perpendicular. I need hardly call attention to a point which is clearly shown in our illustration,— the way in which the old, lofty, open triforium-gallery has now shrunk and changed its character.



FRENCH FLAMBOYANT TRACERY, ROUEN CATHEDRAL.

which is in strong opposition to the audacious, experimental, emotional, imaginative impulse of his Gallic brother.

Yet, somewhat more prosaic though it is in general temper and idea, English architecture has certain attractive qualities quite peculiar to itself. Less imaginative in its main constructive programme and also in its decorative details — for figure-sculpture plays an infinitely less important part in English work than it does in French — it was, on the other hand, less strictly molded by precept and precedent and authority. The art of England in every age and in every branch — architectural, pictorial, poetic — has shown less tendency than has the art of France to crystallize into homogeneous schools, to formulate ideas and aims and tastes into well marked schemes, and to follow those schemes with general accord. Hence many of its defects; but hence also a persistent revelation of individuality which is certainly not without its charm. We may prefer the French architecture of any given epoch to its island rival; but when examining their several results we find that the latter gives us more variety within its own especial limits. It is not so easy to pick out a *typical* English church as a typical French one; and if this fact means something less in the way of perfection, it means something more of "the element of the unexpected." And few of us have so tender an artistic conscience — at least when shod with our pilgrim shoon — that we cannot delight ourselves in novelty solely for its own sake.

Again, — and this time I note a more indisputable excellence, — while the general proportions beloved of English architects give us less of beauty from one point of view, they give us distinctly more from another; they give us less beauty inside the church, but much more without. The Frenchman loved height and breadth, but before all height — a hundred and forty feet from the floor he sometimes closed the vaults of his greatest naves. But the Englishman loved length most and cared least of all for height — built Salisbury, for example, with a length of four hundred and thirty feet, and gave it a ceiling that rises only eighty-one. Westminster Abbey (which, by the way, is really a French building in a foreign land) is, with its one hundred and one feet, the loftiest church in England; and frequently the other large churches measure even less than Salisbury or than York with its ninety-two feet. Ninety or eighty or even seventy feet may sound tremendous to transatlantic ears; may even look tremendous to transatlantic eyes which are taking their first lessons in the majesty of ancient art. But imagine what such a height must mean if *doubled;* or go to the Ile-de France, or to the Gothic churches of Normandy, or to Cologne (which, again, is a French church, though not on Gallic soil), and see what it means. See the extraordinary beauty, the extraordinary sublimity of such proportions; feel their mystery, their poetry, their overwhelming impressiveness — spiritual, emotional, and not coldly intellectual in quality. Height, in truth, in an interior, is the great enchanter, the great soul-subduer, the great poetizer and awe-inspirer. Length is seen and understood and valued at its worth. Height is *felt;* and the longer we submit ourselves to its influence, the more mysterious, the more bewildering, the more supernal it remains.

If you have seen such things and felt such things before you go to England, there is disappointment in store for you; there you will not find their like. But if you make acquaintance with England first, why, then there is disappointment of another kind awaiting you across the Straits. It is not only that the English cathedrals are very beautifully placed. They have also an incomparable external beauty of their own; and this, I say, by virtue of their very lowness.

More than a hundred feet of height means, outside a church, that the noblest towers seem dwarfed and the loftiest spires seem stunted and the greatest length seems all too short; and means, moreover, a very conspicuous use of flying-buttresses. Used in moderation, no architectural features could be finer; but used to excess, used everywhere in close succession and carried up story after

story, arch within arch, flight over flight, as in so many continental churches, they are more wonderful to the scientific eye than delightful to the artistic. Seen near at hand, it is true, their intricacy, their boldness, their beauty of form and detail, or the mysterious effects of light and shadow their intricacy works, cannot but enchant. But from a little distance, when we view the structure as a whole, they seem not so much to help the walls as to do all the work that walls should do, not so much to give the church stability as to confess its lack thereof; seem less like an intrinsic part of the fabric than like extrinsic props and stays, like stupendous after-thoughts or vast temporary scaffoldings. In many of the tall French churches the huge body is majestic through size alone and not through beauty; seems shapeless by reason of ungraceful proportioning and also by reason of the many buttresses which confuse its outline and conceal its features.

But perhaps the best thing about the long, low sky-line was the way in which it permitted the English architect to give his towers extraordinary dignity, and, moreover, to keep the central one supreme. The tower above the crossing where nave and choir and transepts meet was always supreme in Norman days; but as the Gothic body grew tall in France, this tower inevitably dwindled in the same proportion, dwindled into a mere lantern or spirelet while its whilom subordinates, flanking the western front, usurped its vanished glory. But in England it kept more than its early size and all its comparative importance; and though, as we shall see, the west front suffered by the fact, yet the composition as a whole profited vastly both in beauty and expression.

I should note, however, that it was not only the lowness of the English church which helped the central tower to its full development; its narrowness, which also seems a fault inside, was a fortunate circumstance without, for it permitted, nay, compelled, the transept arms to spread far beyond the line of nave and choir; and their projection meant for the tower that firm lateral support the eye demands. Thus through the spreading of his transepts and the soaring of his central tower the island architect gave his exterior at once more symmetry, more unity, and more variety; gave it a pyramidal shape in which all parts and forms led up to a dominant common center, and gave it equal beauty from every point of view. And, I repeat, the gain is expressional as well as artistic; for the greatest emphasis is laid not on the west front, the mere place of entrance, but on that vital spot which is the very heart of the great architectural body.

IX.

Of course I have been marking extremes. Of course there are many French churches very beautiful without, and certain English churches much too long and low for true perfection. But all the same, English excess is less painful to the eye than French, English perfection still more perfect, and the English average beyond a doubt more charming. As a general thing, I should say, the English exterior is almost, though not quite, as superior to the French as is the French interior to the English; or I will be a little bolder and say *quite*, if I may reckon up not only its intrinsic merits but also those extrinsic lovelinesses of environment wherein no other land can dare set up a counter-claim to England's.

Yet, after all, we need not greatly concern ourselves with the nice weighing of counter-claims. To enjoy them all we must recognize all diversities as such, but without trying to hold a critical balance true between them — simply being glad that they exist. Why, indeed, should we, pilgrims from afar, whose grandsires bought us better blessings at the sacrifice of our artistic heritage, feel bound to criticise the fact of its very richness when we turn back a moment to study what it was? Why should we ask which is better — complete interior, complete exterior beauty? Surely the best thing possible is that we should find one here and the other there. Why should we quarrel over the greater virtue of apse or no apse? Surely it is well that we have now the shadowy mystery of circling aisles and chapels and again the great square east wall — at Ely with its Lancet groups, at Wells with its arched vista into lower further spaces, at Gloucester with its vast translucent tapestry of glass. The more variety, since variety means different virtues, different charms, and not different degrees of one success, the better, I say, for us who are mere lovers of loveliness; whatever may be the case with the pedant or the Puritan in taste, or with the responsible professor bent on theoretic preachments, or with the practical student forced to choose a text for his own new effort amid the rivaling suggestions of so many varied rhapsodies in stone.

M. G. van Rensselaer.