BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

Notre-Dame.

The church of Notre-Dame at Paris is no doubt still a sublime and majestic edifice. But, notwithstanding the beauty which it has retained even in its old age, one cannot help feeling grief and indignation at the numberless injuries and mutilations which time and man have inflicted on the venerable structure, regardless of Charlemagne who laid the first stone of it and of Philip Augustus who laid the last.

On the face of this aged queen of our cathedrals we always find a scar beside a wrinkle. Tempus edax, homo edacior—which I should translate thus:—Time is blind, man stupid.

If we had leisure to examine with the reader, one by one, the different traces of destruction left upon the ancient church, we should find that Time had had much less hand in them than men and especially professional men.

In the first place, to adduce only some capital examples, there are assuredly few more beautiful specimens of architecture than that façade, where the three porches with their pointed arches; the plinth embroidered and fretted with twenty-eight royal niches; the immense central mullioned window, flanked by its two lateral windows, like the priest by the deacon and the sub-deacon; the lofty and light gallery of open-work arcades supporting a heavy platform upon its slender pillars; lastly, the two dark and massive towers with their slated penthouses—harmonious parts of a magnificent whole, placed one above another in five gigantic stages—present themselves to the eye in a crowd yet without confusion, with their innumerable details of statuary, sculpture, and carving, powerfully contributing to the tranquil grandeur of the whole—a vast
symphony of stone, if we may be allowed the expression; the colossal product of the combination of all the force of the age, in which the fancy of the workman, chastened by the genius of the artist, is seen starting forth in a hundred forms upon every stone: in short, a sort of human creation, mighty and fertile as the divine creation, from which it seems to have borrowed the two-fold character of variety and eternity.

What we here say of the facade must be said of the whole church; and what we say of the cathedral of Paris, must be said of all the churches of Christendom in the middle ages. But to return to the facade of Notre-Dame, such as it appears to us at present, when we piously repair thither to admire the solemn and gorgeous cathedral, which, to use the language of the chroniclers, "by its vastness struck terror into the spectator."

That facade, as we now see it, has lost three important accessories: in the first place, the flight of eleven steps, which raised it above the level of the ground; in the next, the lower range of statues which filled the niches of the three porches, and the upper range of twenty-eight more ancient sovereigns of France which adorned the gallery of the first story, commencing with Childebert and ending with Philip Augustus, holding in his hand "the imperial globe."

Time, raising by a slow and irresistible progress the level of the city, occasioned the removal of the steps; but if this rising tide of the pavement of Paris has swallowed up, one after another, those eleven steps which added to the majestic height of the edifice, Time has given to the church more perhaps than it has taken away; for it is Time that has imparted to the facade that sombre hue of antiquity which makes the old age of buildings the period of their greatest beauty.

But who has thrown down the two ranges of statues?—who has left the niches empty?—who has inserted that new and bastard pointed arch in the middle of the beautiful central porch?—who has dared to set up that tasteless and heavy door of wood, carved in the style of Louis XV., beside the arboresques of Biscornette?—The men, the architects, the artists, of our days.

And, if we step within the edifice, who has thrown down that colossal St. Christopher, proverbial among sta-
tues for the same reason as the great hall of the Palace among halls, and the steeple of Strasburg among stee-
pies? who has brutally swept away those myriads of stat-
ues which peopled all the intercolumniations of the nave
and the choir, kneeling, standing, on horseback, men,
women, children, kings, bishops, soldiers, of stone, mar-
ble, gold, silver, copper, and even wax? Not Time most
assuredly.
And who has substituted to the old Gothic altar, splen-
didly encumbered with shrines and reliquaries, that heavy
sarcophagus of marble with its cherubs and its clouds,
looking for all the world like a stray specimen of the Val
de Grace or the Invalids? who has stupidly inserted that
clumsy anachronism of stone in the Carolingian pavement
of Hercandus? Is it not Louis XIV. fulfilling the vow of
Louis XIII.? And who has put cold white glass instead of those deep-
ly coloured panes, which caused the astonished eyes of
our ancestors to pause between the rose of the great porch
and the pointed arches of the chancel? What would a
sub-chorister of the sixteenth century say on beholding
the yellow plaster with which our Vandal archbishops
have bedaubed their cathedral? He would recollect that
this was the colour with which the executioner washed
over the houses of criminals; he would recollect the ho-
tel of the Petit-Bourbon, thus beplastered with yellow on
account of the treason of the Constable, "and a yellow
of so good a quality," saith Suaup, "and so well laid on,
that more than a century hath not yet faded its colour;" he
would imagine that the sacred fane has become infa-
mous, and flee from it as fast as he could.
And if we go up into the cathedral without passing
over the thousand barbarisms of all kinds, what has been
done with that charming little belfry, which stood over the
point of intersection of the transept, and which, neither less
light nor less bold than its neighbour, the steeple of the
Holy Chapel (likewise destroyed) rose, light, elegant, and
sonorous, into the air, overtopping the towers? It was
amputated (1787) by an architect of taste, who deemed it
sufficient to cover the wound with that large platter of lead,
which looks, for all the world, like the lid of a saucepan.
It is thus that the wonderful art of the middle ages has
been treated in almost every country, especially in France.
In its ruins we may distinguish three kinds of injuries,
which have affected it in different degrees: in the first place, Time, which has here and there chapped and every where worn its surface; in the next, revolutions, political and religious, which, blind and furious by nature, have rushed tumultuously upon it, stripped it of its rich garb of sculptures and carvings, broken its open work and its chains of arabesques and fanciful figures, torn down its statues, sometimes on account of their mitres, at others on account of their crowns; lastly, the fashions, more and more silly and grotesque, which since the splendid deviations of the regeneration have succeeded each other in the necessary decline of architecture. The fashions have in fact done more mischief than revolutions. They have cut into the quick; they have attacked the osseous system of the art; they have hacked, hewn, mangled, murdered, the building, in the form as well as in the symbol, in its logic not less than in its beauty. And then, they have renewed—a presumption from which at least time and revolutions have been exempt. In the name of good taste, forsooth, they have impudently clapped upon the wounds of Gothic architecture their paltry gewgaws of a day, their ribands of marble, their pompons of metal, a downright leprosy of eggs, volutes, spirals, draperies, garlands, fringes, flames of stone, clouds of bronze, plethoric cupids, chubby cherubs, which begins to eat into the face of art in the oratory of Catherine de'Medicis, and puts it to death two centuries later, writhing and grinning in the boudoir of the Dubarry.

Thus, to sum up the points to which we have directed attention, three kinds of ravages now-a-days disfigure Gothic architecture: wrinkles and warts on the epidermis—these are the work of Time; wounds, contusions, fractures, from brutal violence—these are the work of revolutions from Luther to Mirabeau; mutilations, amputations, dislocations of members, restorations—this is the barbarous Greek and Roman work of professors, according to Vitruvius and Vignole. That magnificent art which the Vandals produced academies have murdered. With Time and revolutions, whose ravages are, at any rate, marked by impartiality and grandeur, has been associated a host of architects, duly bred, duly patented, and duly sworn, despoiling with the discernment of bad taste, substituting the chicories of Louis XV. to the Gothic lace-
work, for the greater glory of the Parthenon. This is truly the ass's kick to the expiring lion; the old oak throwing out its leafy crown, to be bitten, gnawed, and torn by caterpillars.

How widely different this from the period when Robert Cenalis, comparing Notre-Dame at Paris with the famous temple of Diana at Ephesus, "so highly extolled by the ancient heathen," pronounced the Gallican cathedral "more excellent in length, breadth, height, and structure."

Notre-Dame, however, is not what may be called a complete building, nor does it belong to any definite class. It is not a Roman church, neither is it a Gothic church. Notre-Dame has not, like the abbey of Tournus, the heavy, massive squareness, the cold nakedness, the majestic simplicity, of edifices which have the circular arch for their generative principle. It is not, like the cathedral of Bourges, the magnificent, light, multiform, efflorescent, highly decorated production of the pointed arch. It cannot be classed among that ancient family of churches, gloomy, mysterious, low, and crushed as it were by the circular arch; quite hieroglyphic, sacerdotal, symbolical; exhibiting in their decorations more lozenges and zigzags than flowers, more flowers than animals, more animals than human figures; the work not so much of the architect as of the bishop; the first transformation of the art, impressed all over with theocratic and military discipline, commencing in the Lower empire and terminating with William the conqueror.

Neither can our cathedral be placed in that other family of churches, light, lofty, rich in painted glass and sculptures; sharp in form, bold in attitude; free, capricious, unruly, as works of art; the second transformation of architecture, no longer hieroglyphic, unchangeable, and sacerdotal, but artistic, progressive, and popular, beginning with the return from the Crusades and ending with Louis XI. Notre-Dame is not of pure Roman extraction like the former, neither is it of pure Arab extraction, like the latter.

It is a transition edifice. The Bezon architect had set up the first pillars of the nave, when the pointed style, brought back from the Crusades, seated itself like a conqueror upon those broad Roman capitals designed to support circular arches only. The pointed style, thenceforward mistress, constructed the rest of the church; but, unpractised and timid at its outset, it displays a breadth, a flatness, and

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dares not yet shoot up into steeples and pinnacles, as it has since done in so many wonderful cathedrals. You would say that it is affected by the vicinity of the heavy Roman pillars.

For the rest, those edifices of the transition from the Roman to the Gothic style are not less valuable as studies than the pure types of either. They express a shade of the art which would be lost but for them—the engrafting of the pointed upon the circular style.

Notre-Dame at Paris is a particularly curious specimen of this variety. Every face, every stone, of the venerable structure is a page not only of the history of the country, but also of the history of arts and science. Thus, to glance merely at the principal details, while the little Porte Rouge attains almost to the limits of the Gothic delicacy of the fifteenth century, the pillars of the nave, by their bulk and heaviness, carry you back to the date of the Carolingian abbey of St. Germain des Prés. You would imagine that there were six centuries between that door-way and those pillars. There are none, down to the alchymist themselves, but find in the symbols of the grand porch a satisfactory compendium of their science, of which the church of St. Jacques de la Boucherie was so complete an hieroglyphic. Thus the Roman abbey and the philosophical church, Gothic art and Saxon art, the heavy round pillar, which reminds you of Gregory VII., papal unity and schism, St. Germain des Près and St. Jacques de la Boucherie—are all blended; combined, amalgamated, in Notre-Dame. This central mother-church is a sort of chimera among the ancient churches of Paris; it has the head of one, the limbs of another, the trunk of a third, and something of them all.

These hybrid structures, as we have observed, are not the less interesting to the artist, the antiquary, and the historian. They show how far architecture is a primitive art, inasmuch as they demonstrate (what is also demonstrated by the Cyclopean remains, the pyramids of Egypt, the gigantic Hindoo pagodas) that the grandest productions of architecture are not so much individual as social works, rather the offspring of nations in labour than the inventions of genius; the deposit left by a people; the accumulations formed by ages; the residuum of the successive evapora-
tions of human society—in short, a species of formations.
Every wave of time superinduces its alluinion, every generation deposits its stratum upon the structure, every individual brings his stone. Such is the process of the beavers, such that of the bees, such that of men. The great emblem of architecture, Babel, is a bee-hive.

Great edifices, like great mountains, are the work of ages. It is frequently the case that art changes while they are still in progress. The new art takes the structure as it finds it, incrusts itself upon it, assimilates itself to it, proceeds with it according to its own fancy, and completes it if it can. The thing is accomplished without disturbance, without effort, without reaction, agreeably to a natural and quiet law. Ceret, there is matter for very thick books, and often for the universal history of mankind, in those successive inoculations of various styles at various heights upon the same structure. The man, the artist, the individual, are lost in these vast masses without any author's name; while human skill is condensed and concentrated in them. Time is the architect, the nation is the mason.

To confine our view here to Christian European architecture, that younger sister of the grand style of the East, it appears to us like an immense formation divided into three totally distinct zones laid one upon another: the Roman* zone, the Gothic zone, and the zone of the revival, which we would fain call the Greco-Roman. The Roman stratum, which is the most ancient and the lowest, is occupied by the circular arch, which again appears, supported by the Greek column, in the modern and uppermost stratum of the revival. The pointed style is between both. The edifices belonging exclusively to one of these three strata are absolutely distinct, one, and complete. Such are the abbey of Jumièges, the cathedral of Rheims, the Holy Cross at Orleans. But the three zones blend and amalgamate at their borders, like the colours in the solar spectrum. Hence the complex structures, the transition edifices. The one is Roman at the foot, Gothic in the

* This is the same that is likewise called, according to countries, climates, and species, Lombard, Saxon, and Byzantine. These four are parallel and kindred varieties, each having its peculiar character, but all derived from the same principle—the circular arch.
middle, Greco-Roman at the top. The reason is that it was six centuries in building. This variety is rare; the castle of Etampes is a specimen of it. But the edifices composed of two formations are frequent. Such is Notre-Dame at Paris, a building in the pointed style, the first pillars of which belong to the Roman zone, like the porch of St. Denis, and the nave of St. Germain des Prés. Such too is the charming semi-gothic capitular hall of Bocherville, exhibiting the Roman stratum up to half its height. Such is the cathedral of Rouen, which would be entirely Gothic, were it not for the extremity of its central steeple, which penetrates into the zone of the revival.†

For the rest, all these shades, all these differences, affect only the surface of edifices; it is but art which has changed its skin. The constitution itself of the Christian church is not affected by them. There is always the same internal arrangement, the same logical disposition of parts. Be the sculptured and embroidered outside of a cathedral what it may, we invariably find underneath at least the germ and rudiment of the Roman basilica. It uniformly expands itself upon the ground according to the same law. There are without deviation two naves, intersecting each other in the form of a cross, and the upper extremity of which rounded into an apsis, forms the chancel; and two aisles for processions and for chapels, a sort of lateral walking-places, into which the principal nave disgorges itself by the intercolumniations. These points being settled, the number of the chapels, porches, towers, pinnacles, is varied to infinity, according to the caprice of the age, the nation, and the art. Accommodation for the exercises of religion once provided and secured, architecture does just what it pleases. As for statues, painted windows, mullions, arabesques, open work, capitals, basso-relievo— it combines all these devices agreeably to the system which best suits itself. Hence the prodigious external variety in those edifices within which reside such order and unity. The trunk of the tree is unchangeable, the foliage capricious.

† It was precisely this part of the steeple, which was of wood, that was destroyed by the fire of heaven in 1815.