

II.

THE RELIGIOUS BEARING OF ARCHÆOLOGY
UPON ARCHITECTURE AND ART.

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE SURREY ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY, AT THE BRIDGE-HOUSE HOTEL, SOUTHWARK, MAY 10, 1854.

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WHEN, some years ago, I was a student of the Middle Temple, and was picking up such an acquaintance with law as “eating terms” with that ancient and honourable society will impart, I recollect that it was among the traditions of the practice of the Bar, that, on all occasions, when a compliment or an honour was bestowed on the members of a particular circuit, it was the junior member of their mess who was required to acknowledge the one, or do homage for the other. The motive that influences that learned body herein, I take to be this,—that they are anxious to testify to an admiring world that in all things relating to the dignity and credit of their order, they can commit themselves as confidently to the zeal and ability of the youngest and most inexperienced amongst them, as they could to the learning and discretion of the oldest and most practised of their leaders. I presume that a similar conviction has influenced the Council of the Surrey Archæological Society in having required me, the least qualified, and probably the most ignorant of their members, to deliver an address before you this night, upon subjects concerning which I have everything to learn, and nothing to impart.

I feel, however, that the subject will suffer no disparagement, among such partial judges as yourselves, in consequence of the inability of the essayist to do full justice to its merits; but that you will accord full indulgence to the crudities of one who admits that he does not appear among you in the attitude of a teacher speaking with authority, but rather in that of an anxious inquirer after truth sitting at the feet of a learned and eloquent Gamaliel.

Now, although archæology is by no means confined to the architecture and antiquities which faith has raised and sanctified, and impiety profaned and scattered, though the rough hewn sarcophagus of our Saxon ancestors is as dear to the antiquary's heart as the most elaborately-chiselled tomb of the pseudo-martyr of the middle age; yet, as the study has of late years been gradually, but surely, raising itself to the dignity of a science having no insignificant influence upon practical results, I may be permitted to glance at one of these, which is the most important, and seek to show the Religious Bearing of Archæology upon Architecture and Art.

Now, I am sure you will all allow that, next to the works of God, nothing is so worthy of admiration in the world as those creations of man which have been suggested and inspired by the religious sentiment. Partaking of the grandeur of their object—stamped, so to speak, with the imprint of the Deity to whom they have been consecrated—they bear about them a certain character of sublime elevation which recommends them to universal admiration.

It is as impossible to remain insensible before a magnificent cathedral, or a picture by Raffaele, or a fresco by Michael Angelo, as it is when we are contemplating,

in the calm twilight, some glorious and wide-spread scene of nature. In the latter case we recognise the creative and omnipotent hand of God; in the former, that of man, struggling to emancipate himself from the thralldom of his own weakness, and seeking to compensate by ideality for the mighty distance which separates his own from his Maker's works! This constant tendency to bring ourselves nearer to the Deity by our works, to perpetuate this contest between mind and matter, constitutes man's whole existence; it is the drama of his life, his passion; it is, in one single word, Art. For what, in fact, is art, but action spiritualized—action which calls into exercise all those higher faculties which harmonize, combine, and blend with the passive strength of nature?

Now, if considered in its highest point of view, Art may be said to partake of somewhat of the Divine nature; is not this especially the case when its efforts are consecrated to the works of God? And this principle, when applied particularly to ecclesiastical architecture, is justified by the most abundant evidence. Nothing, indeed, is so grand as the monuments it has raised; none of the other efforts of art have ever succeeded in producing that wonderful combination of the ponderous with the graceful, the massive with the light, which, like everything that partakes of the sublime, astonishes, amazes, and yet delights. By the union of material and ideal beauty, of which it is the type, it satisfies the double craving of our twofold nature; it impresses our senses, at the same time that it elevates the mind.

It is in this last exclusively moral influence that we recognise the characteristic feature of religious architecture. Being the faithful expression of a feeling of

love and gratitude to the Divinity, it seeks, simultaneously, to reflect and to inspire the sentiment to which it owes its origin. That spontaneous testimony, rendered by man to the Author of all things, was originally manifested by psalms and hymns; but soon the song alone began to be insufficient—words demanded a substantial representative—the hymn assumed a shape of stone—the altar was erected on the summit of the mountain, on the margin of the river, or in the solitude of the forests; the incense smoked beneath richly-sculptured roofs; God at length had His temple, and religious architecture was erected!

It is not, however, to ecclesiology alone that the objects of this Society are directed, and if I appear to have given an undue prominence to this department of archæological science, it is because it is the mother and the nurse of all the rest, and I conceive that it comes eminently within the scope of the operations of a body like ourselves to remark, amid the characteristic of grandeur which is peculiar to it, how completely religious architecture has yielded to the influence of the times, places, and worships of which it was the outward manifestation. Morose and mysterious in India, it concealed, amid the caves of its subterranean temples, the arena of its incomprehensible pantheism. Gigantic, and no less enamoured of mystery, in Egypt, it seems anxious, by its pyramids, its obelisks, and its sphinxes, to defy alike the researches of science and the ravages of time.

We see it beneath the blue sky of Greece, blossoming in all the graceful elegance of the smiling Hellenic mythology, and displaying its beauties to the day, crowning every promontory with its flowered capitals, from the colonnades of Neptune's temple, on Mount Parnassus, to

those of Minerva, beneath the verge of the Acropolis. And then, if, from the East, we pass homeward to the West, we shall discover that, although with ourselves, even Christian architecture possesses a type and character essentially original and distinct; yet, still, that beneath this, too, are reproduced the features we have recognised elsewhere.

Thus, in the light spire we perceive the obelisk of Egypt; the cave-temples of India, like the pyramids themselves, are reproduced in one gloomy crypt, those catacombs wherein repose in peace the bones of our ancestors, and the ashes of our martyred saints. Sculpture half destroyed, statues mutilated by the hand of man, or yielding to the decay of time, fantastic figures in every form of poetical grotesqueness, inscriptions scarcely legible, or of which the very allusion cannot be traced;—all these present a vague and mysterious analogy to those hieroglyphics of the elder world, of which the eye curiously follows the sharp outlines without the mind being able to comprehend or guess at the hidden meaning. And it is one of the objects which archæology promotes, to follow up these researches, to trace these resemblances, to deduce these analogies, and thereby to reconstruct, from the minutest and most unpromising fragments, faithful records of all that is grandest and loveliest and noblest in art. For it is with archæology as with its kindred science geology; the triumphs of each are acquired by means of the analytic element carried to the highest point. And in alluding to geology, I speak also of that science which is not indeed the same, but yet which is seldom separated from it in study. I mean the study in which Cuvier attained such mastery and skill—the study of the remains of extinct races of animals, and the reconstruction of their scat-

tered bones, so as to afford, by analogy, no small probability of an accurate estimate as to their structure, their size, and even their habits of life. And this recalls to my recollection a most striking discovery of a disciple of Cuvier with reference to one of those animals, which, so far as we know, human eye had never seen, and of which, in this instance, it happens that no vestige of the substance remains; not one fragment of its bones, not a shred of its skin.

Ask yourselves, then, for one moment, how was it possible to acquire any knowledge respecting it? Does not this, at first sight, appear an almost impossible task? Do not the difficulties in the way appear insuperable? Yet these difficulties were overcome by the school of Cuvier; and how? Why, by the footsteps which this animal, in his lifetime, had impressed upon the sand of the sea-shore. Those footsteps had become petrified in the course of years; and from the examination of these, a follower of Cuvier was enabled to deduce—first, from the intervals between them, a calculation as to the size of the animal; then, from the configuration of the steps, a calculation as to the order of animals to which it might have belonged, comparisons with other animals whose footsteps are the same, or similar; and thus, with no other positive vestige remaining than these petrified footsteps on the shore, the pupil of Cuvier was enabled to construct—not as a vague theory, not as a mere guess, unsupported by experiment, but as the result of analytical reasoning, and of analogies in similar cases—a most probable system as to the size, the structure, nay, even the habits of the animal!

I say then that it is by the application of a similar process, by this careful exercise of the deductive faculties that the archæologist arrives at similar results.

Show him but the fragment of some shattered arch, or conduct him to some secluded spot on the river's bank, where one gaunt buttress, and a few scattered stones are all that are left to testify to the omnipotence of ruin; and from these scant materials alone he will conclude, with certainty, the age, the form, and the purposes of the fabric whose traces thus remain; and as the grey moss lifts its hoary frond, and the fading inscription unveils its mysterious hieroglyphics, gradually every stone, every inscription, and every statue, exhibit to him their outline, and appealing to his heart with all the powerful associations of an immortal interest, become the objects of a new and most harmless idolatry! It is enough for him that they have left but their petrified foot-prints on the sand!

I imagine there are few who would doubt that studies and pursuits of this kind must be a great source of improvement and of delight; but I should wish to convince you of a fact no less certain, though I think less commonly acknowledged, that an acquaintance with this science may advantageously mingle with many details of our common life; that it may lend zest to every enjoyment, and enable those who possess it to taste pleasure which those who are destitute of it can never know. Let me take so common and trivial an occurrence as a summer's holiday; let me suppose a time when many amongst you, released for a time from your more active occupations, are able to enjoy a few weeks' or days' excursion; and let us see whether, in this case, some taste for archæological pursuits may not add greatly to the pleasure you would experience.

The traveller passing rapidly, with all the speed that railroads now supply, through the plains of Lancashire, may stop short when he arrives at Penrith or at Car-

lisle, being anxious during his leisure to explore the lakes of Cumberland on the one side, or the range of the Cheviots on the other. If, then, he turns to the left, and winds his way to the lakes of Cumberland, and ascends the last hill above the lake of Derwentwater, and sees that fair prospect opened before him, he will, on the summit of that hill, find himself amongst the circle of Druids' stones. Now, to those who have not attended to any of the details of the Druids, as Cæsar and Tacitus record them, and as so many modern writers may, if you will, make familiar to you—to those who therefore felt no interest in the Druids, the circle of those stones would seem nothing but a ring of moss-grown fragments of rock, and would be dismissed without a parting thought.

But what pleasure would their contemplation afford to him who had imbued his mind, in some measure, with some of the strange traditions that relate to the rude faith of our forefathers; and how much interest would he feel among those very stones in recalling some traces of their bloody rites or fantastic superstitions! Can you doubt for a moment, which traveller, in this case, would enjoy the greater pleasure?

Or, on the other hand, had the traveller gone to the right, along the foot of the Cheviots, he would at nearly every step encounter the remains of the majestic Roman wall. There again, to any one who was indifferent to archæological pursuits, these remains would seem only so many tufts of matted ivy, and so many heaps of cemented bricks. But he who knew something already, and might wish to know more, of the traces of that wonderful people who fortified an island as we would a town—who constructed works whose magnificence in ruin even now astonishes us—such a traveller would

find ever fresh delight in every trace and vestige of antiquity which presented itself; and while enjoying not less than his companion the other delights of the excursion, the fresh spring air, or the distant view, or the various objects on his way, he would have this great additional source of interest, which the person destitute of that information would be compelled to forego.

Or let us descend to a lower sphere: let us not wander out of the circle of this very borough wherein we are now assembled, and it will be equally easy to show that archæology is not a mere holiday-thing, to be assumed on some special occasion, but that it may mix and blend with the affairs of every-day life, with our hours of business and our moments of leisure—not only without interfering with our occupations, but also diminishing the monotony of our toil. Which, think you, will pursue his avocations with the more elastic spirit: he who passes through the streets of Southwark with no other emotions than those of gain, or he who, as he glances at the stately tower and crumbling glories of the neighbouring church, can recall the legend of the Ferryman Overs, and his daughter Mary, who founded a house of sisters in the place where the last part of that very Church St. Mary Overie now stands; who, as he hastens through the defilement of Kent-street, can call to mind the fact that he is treading upon the very Roman road itself, whereby, 1,800 years ago, Cæsar's legions marched into the metropolis; who, as he passes the Talbot Inn, about midway between these two extremes, can recollect that this is the very identical "Tabard," that hostelrie where Chaucer tells us, in verses still fresh after near 500 years have passed, he lay,

" Redy to wenden on my pilgrimage
To Canterbury, with devout courage ;"

who, if required to extend his walk a few yards further still, can forget the squalor of the notorious Lock's-fields, and the degeneracy of Walworth, in the memory of those merry days when the stalwart youth of London, the sturdy bowmen of those romantic times, met together on those then verdant and shady spots to test their prowess at the Butts of Newington! Surely, then, to be able to derive such pleasure from such sources, is one of the triumphs of the human mind; and surely, even in its first elements and stages, the study of a science which produces these effects needs no apology, no justification, and no defence.

Unimaginative minds may consider this love of the things of the past an exaggerated sentiment; if, however, it be a passion, it is at least an innocent one; and without injuring one human being, it has done, and is still calculated to do, much good. Thanks to it, modern Vandalism has been compelled to suspend its ravages, and false taste its melancholy efforts at embellishment scarcely less disastrous.

Better versed than heretofore in archæological lore, the people of England comprehend that it is their mission to preserve the edifices as well as the faith of their forefathers; and thus they cheerfully second the efforts of authority, and the representations of science, to preserve or to restore all ancient time-honoured monuments. In this love of ancient things, whatever is mere fashion and caprice will pass away and be forgotten; but the substantial results, those master-pieces of art preserved from destruction, and those relics of other ages, which possess a priceless value, rescued from oblivion, will remain. Unlike men's virtues and their vices, the archæologist's good deeds will live on brass; his weaknesses be inscribed on water.

While, however, the altar which archæology has reared has received many worshipers, there have likewise sprung up around this new religion many sceptics. These latter, who seek in all things for the positive and the useful, will coldly ask of what importance is a moss-covered stone, a shattered column, or a headless statue. In their estimation, a bale of merchandise is preferable to a flowered capital; and all the obelisks that lie scattered on the sands of Egypt are, in their eyes, less valuable than the marble chimney-pieces which adorn their rooms.

This preference is excusable in those, indeed, who make industry their sole religion, but it will not hinder the ardent worshippers of art from preserving the purity of their faith. In the midst of those despised ruins, the imposing memorials of a bygone age, there is more than one lesson to be gathered. The philosopher submits his reason to the teaching of the past; the poet nourishes his imagination by his recollections; the artist studies the models which its earlier and purer traditions had created; the historian verifies the speculations he conceives by the records it has left; and the religionist derives from its silent and impressive teaching an ever-recurring testimony to the vanity of all earthly things, which leads him to look up alone to Him, by Whom all things "were and are created."

Let no one, then, exclaim against the inutility and folly of that which tends so greatly to elevate man's heart and soul! No; the sacred dust, the venerable ruin, the shattered urn, are not dumb to those who know how to inspire them with feeling and with speech. An eloquent voice speaks to them from those ruins, and upon walls, blackened by time, they recog-

nise, in living characters, the history of those who now repose beneath their shelter ; through the dark shadow of the night, that imparts a deeper blackness to the shattered heap, or roofless abbey, they can recognise the hero or the priest haunting the spots where his deeds of valour were performed, or his crown of martyrdom endured.

This, then, is the art which we are met together now, to foster and promote ; we would simply desire that posterity may long admire those noble remnants of antiquity which yet survive, the monuments of those who have written a poem upon stone, without having inscribed their names. All these men of genius, however much, apparently, strangers to the traditions of antiquity, have no less preserved sacred the worship of art, and have thereby linked ancient to modern times. Like those mortals of whom the poet Lucretius speaks, who, running in a ring, pass one to the other the torch of life, so have these great artists passed from hand to hand (and that, too, often without being themselves aware of it) the torch which was to illuminate age after age. By the rays which it yet projects we will contemplate their works. Studying the history of the past is no unprofitable way of occupying the present, and awaiting the future. And thus, while the voluntary toils of associated study shall nourish among us friendships, not like the slight alliances of idle pleasure, to vanish with the hour they gladdened, but to endure through life with the pursuit that fed them ; while the peaceful pride of such an institution as ours shall illumine the most troubled rapid of busy life with those consecrating gleams, which shall disclose, in every small mirror of smooth water which its eddies may circle, a steady reflection of some fair and peaceful image, preserving, amidst the im-

pulses of earth, traces of the serenity of heaven; we may exult as the chariot of humanity flies onward, with safety in its speed; for we shall discover, like Ezekiel of old, in prophetic vision, the spirit in its wheels!
