THE FOUR GREAT CATHEDRALS OF THE RHINELAND

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The Rhineland is of absorbing interest to the student of history, of art, and of architecture. While the regions stretching to the east and northeast remained barbaric in the possession of their ferocious inhabitants, the valley of the Middle Rhine was opened to the civilization of the Romans. Cities yet stand where these conquerors built; they knew the delicious flavors of Rhenish wines, and healed themselves in the mineral springs of the adjacent hills. Their weapons, ornaments and utensils, exhumed after fifteen centuries in the soil, may be seen in great numbers in the museum at Mainz.

From that remote period to the present, the beautiful winding valley, with its gray green river hurrying swiftly northward, has been one of the chief theatres of European activity. It could tell of the pagan Alemannians, of their conquest by the Franks, of Charlemagne, of the great ecclesiastical potentates whose rule and title antedate those of the most ancient of Europe's royal houses. The armies of Louis XIV and Napoleon have bivouacked upon its green plateau; it was known to Blucher and to Bismark. And here German art first shone forth after the long night of the Middle Ages. While the painters of northern and central Germany could do no more than portray rigid, expressionless faces and stiff figures of threatening aspect, the artists of Cologne were producing pictures which are unsurpassed for their spirituality. Love, humility, devotion, radiate from the tender faces of their women to such a degree that the merely corporeal is wholly overlooked in the presence of the emotions to which it gives expression.

And as in art, so in architecture, the Germans of the Rhineland were the first to accomplish great results and display their genius for building in the erection of large religious edifices.

During the first five centuries of their life on the soil of southern Europe the Teutons were engaged in assimilating the civilization which they
found there. The results of this fusion of Roman culture with the Teutonic nature, scarcely visible until the tenth century, do not become numerous and striking until the eleventh, and among them, none are more conspicuous than the achievements in architecture. The small number of all but the most necessary structures, resulting from the indifference of that age to the higher needs of society, the instability, consequent upon poverty, of the few which were erected, incessant warfare, conflagration, and, most destructive of all, the invasions of Saracens, Huns, and Northmen, have left but few survivals of the architecture of these centuries save in Italy, notably in Rome and Ravenna. These, for the most part, are basilicas, and give no clue to the characteristics of the transitional type which, in Germany, must have preceded the fully developed Romanesque of that country.

What the churches of the Visigoths, Burgundians, Saxons, and Franks were like is not known. It is reasonable to assume, however, that they were small basilicas with the features of the Romanesque style in rudimentary form. But as examples of this intervening stage of growth are lacking, the ecclesiastical architecture of Germany apparently moved suddenly forward from the modest basilica with simple and unpretentious exterior, to the type best represented by the majestic cathedrals of Mainz, Speyer, and Worms.

If architecture be the art of building according to principles of beauty and harmony, with regard to utility, the Teutonic builders of the tenth and eleventh centuries deserve to be credited with a high degree of originality, for the basilica, the only variety of ecclesiastical architecture prevalent in western Europe prior to that time, was an architectural nullity so far as the exterior was concerned. Usefulness was its dominant characteristic. In construction it was as simple as it could be and fulfil its purpose; an unadorned rectangular building with the central part of the roof elevated to admit
light into the nave. True, the Greek temple, was even more simple in design, since light was admitted through the roof directly, instead of through the walls of the clerestory, but its perfect proportion and the intrinsic beauty of gable and serried columns, make it architecturally superior to the basilica.

No doubt the German architects of those centuries obtained some ideas of form, lines, and decoration from the fragments of Roman and early Christian architecture which, as late as the eleventh century, were to be found along the Rhine; no doubt they were influenced to some degree by the edifices of Lombardy, and perhaps some of the Italian builders crossed the Alps; the art of vaulting great ceilings successfully was invented by a French monk; but notwithstanding these contributions from foreign sources, the Romanesque cathedrals of Germany are the products of native creative genius.

Of the three great masterpieces of the German Romanesque style the Cathedral of Mainz is probably the oldest. Already a Christian city in the fourth century, Mainz had a cathedral dedicated to St. Martin by the first decade of the fifth, but no vestiges of the structure remain. Not until 978, under the rule of Willigis, Archbishop of Mainz, was the church begun, from which, through many vicissitudes, the present cathedral has grown. This building was in the new Romanesque style, but was never used, for on the eve of the day of consecration it was seriously damaged by fire, and a like fate overtook the restored structure in 1081, this time almost totally destroying it. In the church as rebuilt were combined all the features of the German Romanesque, save the vaulted ceilings which were not introduced from France until almost fifty years later. The next centuries saw it further damaged by fire, by use as a fortress, and by lightning. Since the last fire (1191), scarcely a century has passed in which additions and alterations have not been made. The additions
Two views of the Cathedral of St. Peter and St. Paul, Worms
Flying Buttresses, Cologne Cathedral
made from century to century being in the style prevailing at the time, the cathedral is a record of the history of ecclesiastical architecture, and hence one of the most interesting in Europe for the historian. Save for the Gothic upper story of the large western tower, the higher portions of the building are Romanesque, and as the Gothic chapels ranged along its sides are concealed by the surrounding buildings, this single visible Gothic feature does not impress the beholder. The situation of the splendid church is most unfortunate, the nearby houses and business blocks extending to within a few feet of its walls on all sides, with the result that no satisfactory idea of the whole can be obtained. On the bronze doors of the chief entrance, which is approached by a narrow alley leading from the city market place between the encroaching houses, is an inscription stating that they were manufactured in the year 988 for Archbishop Willigis.

The Cathedral of St. Peter and St. Paul at Worms, in the pure German Romanesque, was almost wholly completed by 1181 and was consecrated the same year. The church which originally stood upon the site of the present building, dated from the far-off days of the Burgundian Kingdom, when the events were transpiring of which the Niebelungenlied tells. But the oldest part of the present building, the lower part of the two western towers, was not built earlier than the end of the eleventh century. Happily, this cathedral has been spared the ravages by fire and the enemy which overtook so many of the German churches, and although slow in building, the original plan remained unchanged, thus giving a structure possessing perfect purity of Romanesque design.

There being an open square on either side of the cathedral, the observer can obtain an unobstructed view of the entire building, which enables him to appreciate the beauty of the German Romanesque and the great difference between this type of church and the basilica from which it sprang.
The transept, which, if present in the basilica, was usually built across the end of the nave, is here penetrated by it, thus giving to the edifice the form of a Latin cross, while the basilica was frequently T shaped. The intersection of nave and transept is surmounted by an octagonal cupola ornamented by a gallery with Roman arches just beneath the eaves. Like many of the German churches of this period, this one has an apse at each end of the nave, one square, the other polygonal, and two choirs also. The apses are much larger than in the basilica, and of more importance architecturally. Each end of the nave is flanked by two slender, round towers, one pair of which is decorated by galleries with the Roman arch. Between these two is a cupola similar in construction and ornament to the other. Beneath the eaves of the roof, aisle and transept, and extending around the towers at regular intervals are friezes, or arcades of Roman arches. As was usual in the German Romanesque churches, the principal portal, here facing the south, is richly ornamented with sculptured figures representing biblical and allegorical scenes. Except for this entrance, the arcades and galleries already mentioned, the incipient buttresses, little more than pilasters, which are between the windows of both nave and aisles and the elaborate mouldings of the deeply recessed windows, the exterior is without ornamentation. Simple dignity is the impression which the cathedral makes.

The interior, with its vast empty spaces, uneven stone floor, rude stone walls, with their great stretches of bare surface undecorated by painting or tablet, seems naked and cold. It is light, however, owing to the unusually large windows and the alternation of light with heavy piers. The simple Romanesque style does not of itself supply the rich interior ornamentation found in the Gothic, and in consequence scanty furnishing gives these great churches a crude, unfinished appearance. But the long history of the old city so
stimulates the imagination and fills the mind with pictures of the past, that the handiwork of man is little needed to satisfy the eye.

The third of the Romanesque cathedrals, at Speyer, is not so large as that at Worms, but its bold and striking outlines gives the appearance of great size. It has more than the appearance of size, however, and to the pedestrian approaching the city across the level floor of the Rhine Valley, it becomes visible, while all other features of the landscape are yet veiled in the haze of distance. How majestic it then seems, with all surrounding objects, including the nearby groves, dwarfed into insignificance beside it!

Unlike the Worms Cathedral, it has a single apse and choir, square towers, and a longer transept. It is also peculiar in having a narthex, or vestibule. While comparatively simple, the exterior ornamentation is somewhat richer than at Worms, the galleries and arcades being employed more frequently, along with small decorative windows.

The interior is made impressive by the boldness of the nave, forty-five feet from pier to pier, and one hundred and five feet to the center of the vault, which is constructed in square bays. The problem of withstanding the tremendous thrust of these great vaulted naves was a difficult one for the Romanesque architect, who, instead of employing the flying-buttress, relied upon massive walls and excessively heavy piers. This expedient was adopted in all three of the cathedrals mentioned, but the thickness of the walls can nowhere be observed so well as at Speyer, where a gallery constructed in them, extends around the whole church.

Even if the cathedral possessed no architectural interest, its historical association would make it a place of pilgrimage. Founded in the first quarter of the eleventh century by Emperor Conrad II, as a place of burial for himself and his successors, it received
the ashes of his son Henry III, his grandson Henry IV, and of Henry V. In one of the small adjoining chapels lay unburied the body of Henry IV, until the papal anathema was removed, and interment could take place. Toward the eastern end of the nave is the slightly elevated royal choir, containing the beautiful memorials, in sarcophagus form, of Rudolph of Hapsburg, and Adolph of Nassau.

In common with all of the Rhineland, the Cathedral of Speyer has suffered from the vandalism of the French. It was pillaged and almost totally destroyed in 1689, and again in 1794, the only relic of the interior furnishing which remained after the plunder in 1689 being the tablet, now preserved in the crypt, which marked the grave of Adolph of Nassau.

The purity of design and favorable situation of the Cathedrals of Worms and Speyer make them the best exemplars from which to obtain an idea of the German Romanesque. Their amplitude, massiveness, and simplicity of decoration give a deep impression of power and dignity. There is a repose and strength about them which is absent in more delicate and more ornate structures. And this does not mean that they lack beauty. Their proportions are good, and the arrangement of towers and cupolas, with high, tapering roofs, most picturesque. But to the eye which can see beyond the cathedrals into the minds guiding the busy hands which formed them, they are more than mere masses of ordered sandstone. In the noblest form of human expression they tell of the spiritual life of the people which created them.

The population of western Europe had just entered upon a new phase of its existence, and these churches are enduring expressions of new hopes and desires. Six centuries of tribal and racial warfare, with but one short interval of comparative peace, had given men a deep sense of the instability of earthly things.
No man dreamed of building for more than a day. To plan for posterity when waves of pagan destroyers perennially swept over the land would have been futile. Not until order emerged from this chaos under the firm rule of the Saxon Emperors did men begin to have a sense of security, the feeling that the peace of to-day would endure till the morrow. With this came the hope that they might transmit something of themselves to the future, and the courage to undertake the task. The first fruits of this new sentiment were the three splendid cathedrals.

And they show with equal clearness the place which religion held in the life of those centuries. It is no accident that the churches surpassed all other structures in size and beauty, that more money and care were lavished upon them than upon even the dwellings of royal personages. Religion then held a correspondingly predominant place in human life and thought. Among the most powerful, few men were so hardy as wholly to ignore its claims. Those who neglected them for a time were almost sure to make expiation by some generous deed, the formation of a church, or endowment of a monastery. And such gifts were prompted by a motive of tremendous power. Life in a world to come was not then a hazy possibility but a most clear and ever present reality. No man doubted the existence of heaven with God enthroned, or of hell with its torturing fires; nor did he doubt the power of the church to consign him to one or the other. It was but common prudence to exempt himself from eternal anguish by timely gifts of atonement. The great churches of Europe are one of the results of this interested generosity.

While the same dread forced from the hand of villain and serf a portion of his pittance, he was influenced by a purer religious motive. The uncertainties and sorrows which the church taught to be the lot of all earthly creatures truly were his portion in life. He suffered everything which a heartless and greedy
tyrant can inflict upon his victims. That a man so placed, seeing not even the hope of happiness in this world, should turn a ready ear to the teaching of eternal bliss to come, was inevitable; it was the only preventive of despair, the only hope, however slender, which enabled him to endure his present miseries. To heed the priests’ appeal for money was to strengthen his hold on future happiness, and so the coppers of the peasant aided the golden crowns of the nobles in rearing the great churches. But the peasant made his gift to glorify a righteous judge who had prepared a reward which was more than recompense for his unhappy life, rather than to an angry and avenging God.

The great cathedrals, then, are monuments to the religious hopes and fears, to the faith of the mediaeval man. In a language whose force and clearness are indisputable, they proclaim that the church was the paramount institution of the age.

That fact is nowhere more impressively presented to the traveler than by the Cathedral of St. Peter at Cologne. In giant proportions and in unity of design it surpasses all the Gothic churches of northern Europe. Standing not far from the Rhine, on the crest of a gentle elevation, it commands the country for miles up and down the river, and its glittering spires are visible long after the rest of the city has faded from view. No one who has once seen it can ever forget its magnificence, its richness.

Yet the architectural style of which it is the best representative was developed from the comparatively simple Romanesque type. This work was carried on in France, and in her churches, beginning with the great abbey church at Cluny, and extending through those of the twelfth century to that of St. Denis, can be traced the development of the principal features of the Gothic style.

The Germans were slow to adopt it, and although the Rhineland was more initiative
than the regions further removed from French influence, its architects long clung to the old style. The church of St. Castor at Coblenz, built so late as 1208, when Gothic had long been common in France, is Romanesque. The first genuinely Gothic work in Germany is the Golden Portal in the Saxon city of Freiberg, dating from 1190. An example of the transition from Romanesque to Gothic, while essentially Romanesque, is the Church of the Apostles at Cologne, in which the pointed arch was used.

The cathedral occupies the site of an old ninth century church which was felt to be unworthy a city with the religious and artistic traditions of Cologne. Accordingly when this structure was almost totally destroyed by fire, the corner-stone of the present building was laid (Aug. 14, 1248). The architect who conceived this splendid pile was Gerard of Riel, under whom the building of the choir was begun. He sought his models in France, imitating almost exactly the then recently completed choir of Amiens Cathedral, and combined in his plan features obtained from several of the most famous French churches. His successors, Master Arnold and Master John, hindered by the contests between the people of the city and the Archbishop, accomplished but little, and the choir was not consecrated until almost eighty years later (1322). The nave and southern tower were completed by 1447, but at the end of the century, the zeal of the builders had soflagged that the hope of completing it according to the original design was given up. During two centuries it was neglected and it began to fall into ruin. Frederick William III., King of Prussia, caused an examination to be made for the purpose of ascertaining what steps were necessary to its preservation, but nothing was done until 1824, when the active work of restoration was begun. From that time until the completion of the spires in 1883, the work slowly went forward, being carried on by public money, the gifts of private persons and societies. Happily, the fourteenth
century plans were discovered and formed the guide for part of the work.

The finished structure is worthy of the many years and millions of money expended in bringing it to perfection. The stranger cannot gaze long enough at that magnificent spreading facade, at the mighty towers whose slender spires rise five hundred feet from the earth. In contrast with the lower, more massive Romanesque, all is height and slenderness. The high towers, the lofty clerestory, the multitude of airy shafts, all contribute to strengthen this impression. Instead of broad, unrelieved wall-spaces with strongly marked horizontal lines and small windows, there are deep buttresses surmounted by long, slender pinnacles; huge windows with complex tracery in stone. This same tracery is used in open gables, balustrades, wherever the opportunity offers, and exquisitely beautiful it is, particularly on the windows of the choir.

One of the characteristics peculiar to the Gothic cathedral which will illustrate the union of the artistic and useful in that style is a prominent feature at Cologne: the flying buttress. This device solves in a new way the problem of supporting the weight of great vaulted naves. The Romanesque architect had resisted the pressure by mere massiveness in walls and piers. But the Gothic architect, turning to use the advantage given him by the groined vaulting which concentrates the pressure at certain points, built buttresses or thick columns of masonry, at these points, instead of a continuously massive wall. The pressure was transferred from the nave walls to the buttress by a half each, and this, with the buttress, constitutes what is known as the flying-butress. When richly carved, as at Cologne, it becomes an important ornamental feature.

The pointed arch, one of the most admired characteristics of the Gothic style, also possesses structural advantage, being devised to facilitate the
construction of the great oblong vaults of the naves. Its intrinsic beauty and decorative possibilities were at once recognized, and at Cologne it appears in a multitude of arcades, principally upon the huge western towers. In fact the cathedral suffers from a redundancy of ornamentation, particularly of finials which rise like a forest along the aisle roofs, and the decoration of other parts seems almost too profuse. Another and much more serious deficit in the exterior at once impresses itself upon the observer, namely, that the building is much too high for its length. The disproportion is most noticeable from a point of view which includes both the front and the side, when the full effect of the extremely tall and massive towers is plainly felt.

The interior is filled with relics of the fervent devotion of the Middle Ages. The brilliantly colored windows of the northern aisle are among the best examples of the art of glass painting in the early sixteenth century. Those in the southern aisle were given by Louis I. of Bavaria, to whom Germany owes so much of her fame in art. The heroes of the Christian religion are represented by a vast number of statues upon the piers of nave and transept: apostles, church fathers, martyrs and saints, the honorable names from the first century to the Middle Ages have been preserved and here perpetuated. From the semi-circular choir open eight chapels in which stand the sarcophagi of some of the most famous of the Archbishops of Cologne. In the chapel where lies Archbishop Walram of Julich is the famous painting by Stephen Lochner, one of Cologne's earliest masters. After the fashion of altar-pieces it is divided into three parts; the middle representing the adoration of the Magi, at the sides St. Gereon and St. Ursula, on the outside, the Annunciation. Although showing the influence of the Netherland realism, it is an excellent example of the early school of Cologne. The next chapel, dedicated to St. Stephen, is interesting because it con-
tains the sarcophagus of Archbishop Gero who died in 976, and a tenth century mosaic, both of which were originally in the old cathedral. Before the entrance to the chapel dedicated to The Three Wise Men of the East, is buried the heart of Marie de Medicis, Henry IV's widow, who died at Cologne in 1642 when banished from France.

In the treasure-chamber, the cathedral chapter has preserved some of its most valuable possessions. Here can be obtained some idea of the regalia of a mediaeval bishop, for the collection includes mitres, bishop's staffs, jeweled garments for great ceremonies, and costly church utensils of many kinds, some of them heavy with precious stones. Perhaps the most interesting and valuable object in the display is the reliquary of the three Magi. It was once supposed to contain their bones which had come into the possession of the Archbishop of Cologne about the middle of the twelfth century. The reliquary is made from gold, in the form of a basilica, and richly decorated with antique gems, many of them engraved.

But, however great the interest which these relics of mediaeval life awaken, it is, after all, the church itself which exerts the greatest fascination. It is like the magic of the Alps. So long as those marble peaks, gleaming in the splendor of the sunshine, are within view, the eye, as if enchanted, turns to them irresistibly. And so here, the gaze, resting impatiently upon shrine, statue or altar, wanders ever to the far-off vault, the long perspective of lofty piers, the vast spaces of the choir. Skilled architects say that the interior is faulty in many ways. It may be so. But in that vast church with its great magnitude and its wealth of ornamentation, the mind is so filled with wonder at the grandeur of the place that there is little disposition to examine critically. Humility and awe, rather, are the states of mind produced by so much that is majestic and beautiful.