Émile Mâle, Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century. Dover 2000 [1898].

PREFACE

To the Middle Ages art was didactic. All that it was necessary that men should know—the history of the world from the creation, the dogmas of religion, the examples of the saints, the hierarchy of the virtues, the range of the sciences, arts and crafts—all these were taught them by the windows of the church or by the statues in the porch. The pathetic name of *Biblia pauperum* given by the printers of the fifteenth century to one of their earliest books, might well have been given to the church. There the simple, the ignorant, all who were named "sancta plebs Dei," learned through their eyes almost all they knew of their faith. Its great figures, so spiritual in conception, seemed to bear speaking witness to the truth of the Church's teaching. The countless statues, disposed in scholarly design, were a symbol of the marvellous order that through the genius of St. Thomas Aquinas reigned in the world of thought. Through the medium of art the highest conceptions of theologian and scholar penetrated to some extent the minds of even the humblest of the people.

But the meaning of these profound works gradually became obscure. New generations, with a different conception of the world, no longer understood them, and from the second half of the sixteenth century mediæval art became an enigma. Symbolism, the soul of Gothic art, was dead.

The Church was ashamed of the once beloved legends, in which for so many centuries Christianity had been nurtured. The council of Trent marks the end of the old artistic tradition, and we know from a book full of the spirit of the council, that the writer—Molanus the theologian—had lost the key to the art of the Middle Ages.[1]

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Benedictines of Saint-Maur, when writing of the ancient churches of France, displayed an ignorance which was anything but creditable to their order's reputation for learning. In his *Monuments de la monarchie française* Montfaucon reads into the cathedral façades scenes from the history of France and portraits of her kings.

And what can one say of those who speak of Gothic bas-reliefs and statues as they might speak of the antiquities of India. Some have imagined

[1] Molanus, *De historia sanct. imag. et picturarum.* The first edition was published in 1580. See the Louvain edition of 1771, with Paquot's notes.

that they read the secret of the philosopher's stone in the porch at Notre Dame at Paris.[1] At the end of the eighteenth century Dupuis found in the Zodiac at Notre Dame an argument in support of his famous theory of the solar origin of all religions, and his pupil Lenoir read the legend of Bacchus into a series of bas-reliefs relating to St. Denis.[2]

The true meaning of mediæval art, which had grown more obscure than hieroglyphics, has had to be laboriously re-discovered in our time. To those who come without preparation the portals of Amiens or the north porch at Chartres are a closed book. A guide is a necessity. Since 1830 many mysteries have been solved through the labours of archæologists like Didron or Cahier, but even their researches have left secrets still undisclosed, and their work needs to be co-ordinated and welded into an organic whole.

This book is an attempt to give systematic form to their researches, and wherever possible to complete them. It is hoped that it may prove of service to historians of art, for to study mediæval art, as is sometimes done, without reference to the subject-matter and with attention wholly given to progress in technique, leads to misunderstanding and confusion of the aims of successive periods.[3] Gothic sculptors had a very different conception of art from that of a Benvenuto Cellini. They did not believe that choice of subject was a matter of indifference, and they did not think of a statue as merely intended to give momentary pleasure to the eye. In mediæval art every form clothes a thought;[4] one could say that thought works within the material and fashions it. The form can not be separated from the idea which creates and animates it. Work of the thirteenth century interests us even when inadequately executed for we feel there is something in it akin to a soul. Some understanding of the aims of the artists must precede the right to pass judgment on them. For this reason the natural introduction to the study of mediæval art is a methodical review of the subject-matter in which that art delighted. It is a vast enterprise, for all that was best in thirteenth-century thought assumed plastic form. All that was laid down as essential by the theologian, the encyclopædist, the interpreter of the Bible, was expressed in sculpture or in painted glass. We shall

[1] Gobineau de Montluisant, alchemist of the seventeenth century. His treatise was published in the *Annales archéologiques*, xxi. pp. 139–199.

[2] Alexandre Lenoir, *Description historique et chronologique des monumens de sculpture réunis au musée des monumens français*, An. X., sixth edition, p. 120.

[3] This for instance is Lübke's error in the chapters which he devotes to mediæval art (*Geschichte der Plastik*, i. and ii., Leipzig, 1880, 8vo).

[4] We do not refer to purely decorative art. In Book I. we shall show that it has no symbolic value.

attempt to show how the craftsman translated the thought of the doctor, and to draw a complete picture of the liberal education which a thirteenth-century cathedral offered to all.

A synthetic work of this kind is open to the objection that it gives no sufficient indication of the slow growth that was going on during the centuries preceding the thirteenth. The thirteenth century is the period when the thought of the Middle Ages was most fully expressed in art—hence our choice of it—but it was very far from originating all the modes of expression which it perfected. It had inherited a multitude of types, of dispositions, and of ideas from previous centuries. The long evolution of Christian art is one of the most interesting, as it is one of the most elusive subjects of research that can be undertaken by the scholar. Nothing could be more instructive than to follow the representation of a given person or scene, from the art of the catacombs to that of the cathedrals. Careful study of the same type, observing its development in chronological order from fifth-century mosaics, through Byzantine miniatures, Carlovingian ivories and Romanesque capitals to the sculpture and glass of the thirteenth century, would reveal a long series of stages in the evolution of Christian thought. It would be seen, for example, that the art of the catacombs does not venture to show to the faithful the image of the crucified Christ, that Romanesque art of the early period represents Him on a jewelled cross, crowned and triumphant, with open eyes and lifted head, and that the art of the thirteenth century, less doctrinal and more human, shows the crucified figure with closed eyes and drooping form. The final appeal is to the heart rather than to the head.

Close study of subtle changes of this kind would show how fluid and mobile, in a word how living a thing mediæval Christianity was, but it would be the work of a lifetime. Didron attempted it, but he only reached a study of the three Persons of the Trinity.[1] Another attempt was made by Count Grimouard de Saint-Laurent,[2] but his wish to include in his *Guide de l'art chrétien* the whole development of art from its origin to his own day condemned him, in spite of his great learning, to superficiality of treatment. We propose to follow another method. We shall consider the art of the thirteenth century as a living whole, as a finished system, and we shall study the way in which it reflects the thought of the Middle Ages. In this way

[1] Didron, *Iconographie chrétienne. Histoire de Dieu*, Paris, 1844, 4to (series of unpublished documents relating to the history of France).

[2] Grimouard de Saint-Laurent, *Guide de l'art chrétien*, 6 vols. 8vo, Paris and Poitiers, 1872–73.

we shall gain some idea of the majesty of the whole, some notion of the truly encyclopædic range of mediæval art in its prime. The thirteenth century is the central point of our study, for it was then that art with admirable daring tried to express all things. The iconography of the richest Romanesque work is poor indeed beside the wealth of Gothic imagery, and the period we have chosen is precisely that in which the façades of the great French churches were thought out and executed. Occasionally it has been necessary to go beyond the limits of the thirteenth century ; the old west porch of Chartres, for example, was carved about the year 1150, and the exterior decoration of Notre Dame at Paris was not finished until the beginning of the fourteenth century. It is evident that it would have been artificial to confine our research to the period between 1200 and 1300.

It is not because we believe that the art of neighbouring nations obeys different rules that we have limited our study to that of French art. On the contrary the character of the art of the thirteenth century was as truly universal as was its Christian teaching. We have satisfied ourselves that the great subjects in which it delighted were conceived of at Burgos, Toledo, Siena, Orvieto, Bamberg, Friburg, just as they were at Paris or at Reims. But we are convinced that Christian thought was not expressed elsewhere so fully or so richly as in France. In the whole of Europe there is no group of works of dogmatic art in the least comparable to that presented by the cathedral of Chartres. It was in France that the doctrine of the Middle Ages found its perfect artistic form. Thirteenth-century France was the fullest conscious expression of Christian thought. There is little to be learned from foreign cathedrals when one knows Chartres, Amiens, Paris, Reims, Laon, Bourges, Le Mans, Sens, Auxerre, Troyes, Tours, Rouen, Lyons, Poitiers and Clermont, but we have occasionally taken examples from Germany, Italy or England to give added force to a demonstration. French art is none the less the subject of our study.

Hitherto there has been no book on this subject.[1] A work of synthesis would have seemed premature to the archæologists who created the science of Christian iconography, but after more than sixty years of detailed research such an attempt may appear to be less rash. Since 1830 several

[1] The following should however be mentioned :— *Iconographie chrétienne*, by the Abbé Crosnier, Caen, 1848, 8vo ; *Institutions de l'art chrétien*, by the Abbé Pascal, Paris, 1858, 2 vols. 8vo ; *Traité d'iconographie chrétienne*, by Mgr. Barbier de Montault, Paris, 1890, 2 vols. 8vo. Detzel's study of iconography also deserves mention (H. Detzel, *Christliche Ikonographie*, 2 vols., Friburg-im-Breisgau, 1894–96, 8vo). Reference should also be made to the good summary made by Krauss in the *Geschichte der christl. Kunst*, ii. p. 263 *sq.*, Friburg, 1897. In all these books the works of art are too seldom related to the theological, liturgical, and legendary works of the Middle Ages.

reviews, devoted entirely to mediæval art, have brought a multitude of valuable facts to light, and in addition, the French cathedrals have almost all been the subjects of monographs which, though far from being complete, give a sufficient number of precise and well-observed facts to make it possible to formulate certain broad general principles. We have verified the accuracy of these works by careful study of the originals.

In the first rank must be mentioned the *Annales archéologiques*, a publication which for more than twenty years was inspired by Didron. An enthusiastic admirer of Victor Hugo, Didron belonged to the Romantic age and brought to the study of the past almost as much imagination as learning. But if he were guilty of error, he imparted something of his own enthusiasm to a whole generation of archæologists. The *Bulletin monumental* founded by M. de Caumont and the *Revue de l'art chrétien* founded by Canon Corblet are mines of information.[1] Father Cahier, with the help of assistants and especially with the help of Father Martin's delicate drawing, published two learned collections entitled *Mélanges* and *Nouveaux mélanges d'archéologie*.[2] In the nineteenth century no one was better acquainted with mediæval art than Father Cahier. His *Vitraux de Bourges*[3] and his *Caractéristiques des saints dans l'art populaire*,[4] though unhappily disfigured by a polemical tone and an unnatural style, are works of sound learning. Mention should also be made of reviews such as the *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes*, the *Revue archéologique* or the *Gazette archéologique*, although in them mediæval art fills but a small space. Finally, the numerous provincial archæological societies formed since 1830 at the instigation of M. de Caumont, have published a large number of Bulletins and Mémoires of which a list is given by M. de Lasteyrie and M. Lefèvre-Pontalis.[5] One of the oldest French learned societies, the Société des Antiquaires de France, deserves special mention, for its Mémoires, especially those published since 1840, are often of great interest.

These are the sources from which we have drawn much of our material. But works of art have taught us more even than books, and we have seen and seen again all those of which we write. Moreover in

[1] To these should be added the series of the *Congrès archéologiques de France*.

[2] Cahier and Martin, *Mélanges d'archéologie, d'histoire et de littérature*, Paris, 1847–56, 4 vols., folio ; Cahier, *Nouveaux mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire*, Paris, 1874–77, 4 vols., folio.

[3] Cahier and Martin, *Vitraux peints de Saint-Étienne de Bourges*, Paris, 1842–44, folio.

[4] Cahier, *Les Caractéristiques des saints dans l'art populaire*, Paris, 1866–68, 2 vols., 4to.

[5] R. de Lasteyrie and Lefèvre-Pontalis, *Bibliographie des travaux historiques et archéologiques publiés par les sociétés savantes*, Paris, 1888 etc., Imp. Nat., 4to. This contains the index both to the *Bulletin monumental* and to the *Congrès archéologiques de France*.

Paris, where the cast museum at the Trocadéro contains a large number of fragments, one can study at leisure things which *in situ* must be examined more rapidly than one could have wished. Three large collections of photographs and engravings have also been in constant requisition ; one is at the Bibliothèque du Trocadéro (collection of architectural illustrations),[1] another in the Bibliothèque de l'École des Beaux-Arts, a third in the Cabinet des Estampes. The last named, which is known as the "Grande Topographie de la France," is principally composed of engravings and drawings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but is of great value as giving illustrations of works of art which have disappeared, and in showing the condition of monuments before restoration.[2]

In this way we have been able to give constant and detailed study to the principal statues and bas-reliefs scattered throughout France. It was impossible to study the glass with the same facility, as attempts at photographic reproduction have so far been rare. Fortunately a real *corpus* of the principal windows of the thirteenth century, taken from Father Martin's drawings, is given by Father Cahier in his *Vitraux de Bourges*. Other windows have been reproduced by M. de Lasteyrie in his *Histoire de la peinture sur verre*,[3] and monographs such as Bourassé and Marchand's *Vitraux de Tours*,[4] Hucher's *Vitraux du Mans*,[5] MM. de Florival and Midoux's *Vitraux de Laon*,[6] added a number of new plates to the unhappily far from complete collection.

Manuscripts containing miniatures could not be ignored. Once more we recognised the rules which monumental art obeyed, and at times it seemed almost as though the miniaturists were the true creators of the types adopted later by sculptor and glass-painter. We are convinced that careful study of miniatures would result in numerous discoveries in this direction, but up to the present the work has been difficult. The very summary catalogue of manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale does not allow of really systematic research. A catalogue of the miniatures in Latin manuscripts, begun by M. Bordier on the model of his catalogue of the miniatures in Greek manuscripts, remains unfinished.[7] The work of collating the many illus-

[1] Supplemented by the collection in the Rue de Valois (Commission des monuments historiques).

[2] To these collections should be added that formed by M. Martin-Sabon, so well known to all students of the Middle Ages.

[3] F. de Lasteyrie, *Histoire de la peinture sur verre*, Paris, 1838–58, folio.

[4] Marchand and Bourassé, *Verrières du chœur de l'église métropolitaine de Tours*, Paris, 1849, folio.

[5] Hucher, *Vitraux peints de la cathédrale du Mans*, Le Mans, 1868, folio.

[6] Florival and Midoux, *Les Vitraux de Laon*, Paris, 1882–91, 4to.

[7] It has not been printed, but may be consulted under the head of Nouvelles acquisitions françaises, 5813, 5814, 5815. The summary catalogue of illustrated MSS. in the Bibliothèque Nationale, drawn up by the Comte de Bastard, should be mentioned. It also has not been published, Bibl. Nat., Nouvelles acquisitions françaises, 5811–5812.

trated manuscripts which still await investigation, of tracing their descent and classifying them into schools, will demand the labour of several generations of scholars.[1] On the other hand the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève and the Bibliothèque Mazarine now have excellent descriptive catalogues. But we have consulted the miniatures only so far as they throw light on the main subject of our study, the statues and glass of the thirteenth century.

The work we have attempted is beset with many difficulties. For more than two centuries a process of destruction or, what often amounts to the same thing, of restoration has been going on in nearly all the great churches. The façades of Notre Dame at Paris and of the cathedrals at Reims and Bourges bear the mark of such restorations ; here a saint has received a new head, there a virtue has changed her attributes. The glass in almost all the churches has suffered from the unskilful restoration of the eighteenth century. The order of subjects has been reversed, or fragments of a scattered window have served to patch up neighbouring glass. At Auxerre, for instance, panels from the legend of St. Eustace and from the lives of St. Peter and St. Paul are found distributed haphazard in several windows of the choir and aisles. We have here a source of endless confusion and error.

From the point of view of the scholar the more intelligent restoration of our own day is almost as vexatious. Mutilated windows have been completed with an ability which makes it difficult at first sight to distinguish the older from the more recent work, and one runs the risk of searching for the laws of mediæval iconography among works of the nineteenth century. Local monographs do not always mention these restorations. Happily the works usually speak for themselves, and some less glowing colour, some less bold design, some unusual feature in the composition warn us that we are dealing with modern work. In order to separate the old from the new and to recover the proper sequence of ideas, a preliminary critical study of thirteenth-century work is indispensable. We trust that we have met the requirements of criticism in this matter.

A second difficulty arises in assigning limits to the treatment of the subject. The length of several chapters might well have been doubled. That on the *Golden Legend*, for instance, might have been indefinitely

[1] See M. Léopold Delisle's study of illustrated books, *Hist. littér. de la France*, xxxi. p. 13 *sq.* He attempts to classify the MSS. containing miniatures. See also G. Vitzthum, *Die Pariser Miniaturmalerei*, Leipzig, 1907.

lengthened had we enumerated all the works of art in which its saints figure. But as we do not claim to have written a complete treatise on iconography it has seemed best to omit all but essentials, and to give only those examples which should serve to illustrate most clearly the dominant ideas which inspired mediæval art.

The study of the theological literature of the Middle Ages has been perhaps the most serious of all the difficulties which have confronted us. One is literally overwhelmed by the enormous volume of the work produced by the doctors of the Church in the course of ten centuries.

But closer examination of the works of the commentators on Scripture, the liturgiologists, and the encyclopædists has shown in a surprising way that they repeat each other indefinitely. Isidore of Seville summarises the Fathers, the Venerable Bede is inspired by Isidore, Rabanus Maurus by Bede, Walafrid Strabo by Rabanus Maurus and so on. In days when communication was difficult, books rare, and ideas slow to spread, it was judged a worthy deed to abridge some celebrated book, to extract the substance of some famous treatise, or even to reproduce almost unaltered the work of some ancient doctor. Literary amour-propre—the pride of authorship—was unknown to the early Middle Ages. It was plain that a doctrine belonged not to him who expounded it but to the Church as a whole. To write a book and so to make known the truth to one's neighbour, was in a sense to practise one of the works of mercy.

It follows that the apparently immense library of the Middle Ages consists after all of a very few works. Ten well chosen books might almost literally be said to take the place of all others. The commentators on the Old and New Testaments are summarised in the *Glossa ordinaria* of Walafrid Strabo, completed in the fourteenth century by Nicolas de Lyra. The whole of the symbolic liturgy is in the *Rationale divinorum officiorum* of Gulielmus Durandus. The spirit and method of the old preachers live again in the *Speculum Ecclesiae* of Honorius of Autun. Sacred history, as then understood, is found in the *Historia Scolastica* of Peter Comestor and in the *Legenda aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine, profane history in the *Speculum historiale* of Vincent of Beauvais. All that was known of the physical world is summarised in the *Speculum naturale*, and all that was known of the moral world in the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas, epitomised in the *Speculum morale*.

A reader familiar with these works will have penetrated the depths of the mediæval mind. The age which adopted them saw in them its own

reflection, and the esteem in which they were held caused us to choose them as our guide.

The study of these books, whose classical character at once arrested our attention, has provided a point of departure in the midst of this vast mass of literature. In course of time others have gathered round them, but it is to these books that we refer by preference, for they are truly representative. The doctrines they expound, the legends they adopt, were generally accepted by the Church, and thanks to them we have been able to reduce materially the number of our quotations. Father Cahier in his *Vitraux de Bourges* filled whole pages with quotations, not satisfied until he could trace a dogma step by step from Augustine to Aquinas. This is surely the affectation of learning, for in such a case one good testimony would suffice. After reading the *Glossa ordinaria*, it is as a rule of little use to study other commentaries on the Bible.

We have not, however, neglected other resources offered by patristic study. It has sometimes been necessary to multiply instances to prove that a case which to-day seems extraordinary was not really an unusual one. Then too, our guides at times have proved superficial, and it has been necessary to supplement them by other writers. But as a rule we have remained faithful to our method of referring to famous compilations which summarise the learning of the period.

Literature in the vernacular, as one might expect, has been of little service. The Légendes des saints, the Images du monde, the rhymed Bestiaires are merely translations, and often lifeless ones. The finest and most profound books of the Middle Ages were not and could not be translated. The French of the thirteenth century, which tells a story with charm and force, and sings not without grace, was yet incapable of expressing abstract thought. Latin long remained the language of the thinker, and no adequate knowledge of the Middle Age could be gained through popular literature.

We have therefore avoided the timid adaptations of French writers, and have gone straight to the original works.

Religious Art of the Thirteenth Century in France

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF MEDIÆVAL ICONOGRAPHY

I.—Mediæval Iconography is a script. II.—It is a calculus. The mystic numbers. III.—It is a symbolic code. Art and the Liturgy.

THE Middle Ages had a passion for order. They organised art as they had organised dogma, secular learning and society. The artistic representation of sacred subjects was a science governed by fixed laws which could not be broken at the dictates of individual imagination. It cannot be questioned that this theology of art,[1] if one may so put it, was soon reduced to a body of doctrine, for from very early times the craftsmen are seen submitting to it from one end of Europe to the other. This science was transmitted by the Church to the lay sculptors and painters of the thirteenth century who religiously guarded the sacred traditions, so that, even in the centuries in which it was most vigorous, mediæval art retained the hieratic grandeur of primitive art.

These are the general principles which it concerns us to state at the outset as briefly as possible.

I

The art of the Middle Ages is first and foremost a sacred writing of which every artist must learn the characters. He must know that the circular

[1] Under this title Dr. Piper has written a book in which one can find everything but what one is led to expect. (F. Piper, *Einleitung in die monumentale Theologie*. Gotha, 1867, 8vo.) In it he examines the theological writings of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, but he does not show the bearing of these books on art, which is really his subject. The same criticism may be made of an otherwise interesting book, J. Sauer's *Symbolik des Kirchengebäudes und seiner Ausstattung in der Auffassung des Mittelalters*. Friburg, i. B., 1902, 8vo.

nimbus placed vertically behind the head serves to express sanctity, while the nimbus impressed with a cross is the sign of divinity which he will always use in portraying any of the three Persons of the Trinity.[1] He will learn that the aureole (*i.e.* light which emanates from the whole figure and surrounds the body as a nimbus) expresses eternal bliss, and belongs to the three Persons of the Trinity, to the Virgin, and to the souls of the Blessed. He must know that representations of God the Father, God the Son, the angels and the apostles should have the feet bare, while there would be real impropriety in representing the Virgin and the saints with bare feet. In such matters a mistake would have ranked almost as heresy. Other accepted symbols enabled the mediæval artist to express the invisible, to represent that which would otherwise be beyond the domain of art. A hand emerging from the clouds, making the gesture of benediction with thumb and two fingers raised, and surrounded by a cruciform nimbus, was recognised as the sign of divine intervention, the emblem of providence. Little figures of nude and sexless children, ranged side by side in the folds of Abraham's mantle, signified the eternal rest of the life to come.

There are also accepted signs for objects of the visible world which the artist must learn. Lines which are concentric and sinuous represent the sky, those which are horizontal and undulating represent water (Fig. 1). A tree, that is to say a stalk surmounted with two or three leaves, indicates that the scene takes place on the earth; a tower pierced by a doorway is a town, while if an angel watch on the battlements it is the heavenly Jerusalem.[2] Thus we have a veritable hieroglyphic[3] in which art and writing blend, showing the same spirit of order and abstraction that there is in heraldic art with its alphabet, rules and symbolism.

The artist must be familiar with a multitude of precise details. He is not allowed to ignore the traditional type of the persons he has to represent. St. Peter, for example, must have curly hair, a short, thick beard and a tonsure, while St. Paul must have a bald head and a long beard. Certain details of costume are also unchangeable. Over her head

[1] It is not our object, as we have said, to write the history of the nimbus nor of the other attributes passed in review in this chapter. The greater number date back to remote antiquity, and some (like the nimbus) to pagan times. The question has been fully treated by Didron, *Hist. de Dieu*, pp. 25–170.

[2] All these symbols are constantly used in glass-painting.

[3] The word hieroglyphic does not seem too strong if one remembers that the evangelists were sometimes represented in the form of men with the head of the ox, the eagle and the lion (see capital in the cloister at Moissac). Here mediæval art joins that of ancient Egypt, and is perhaps even derived from it through the Christian art of Alexandria.

the Virgin must wear a veil, symbol of virginity, and the Jews are known by their cone-shaped caps.[1]

All these figures with their unvarying costume and arrested type have their place in traditional scenes. No matter how dramatic may be the scene in which they play a part, their every action has been previously determined. No artist would be rash enough to dare to modify the arrangement of the great scenes from the Gospel. If his subject were the Last Supper he would not be free to group the figures round the table according to his individual fancy. He would have to show at the one side Jesus and the apostles, at the other Judas Iscariot.[2] If he would represent the Crucifixion he must place the Virgin and the lance-bearer to the right of the Cross, St. John and the man with the sponge to the left.

FIG. 1.—THE SKY, WATER AND TREES
(From the Legend of St. Eustace. Window at Chartres)

These examples, which it would be useless to multiply, will suffice to show in what sense mediæval art may be called a sacred script.

At an earlier period than that with which we are dealing these signs and conventions were of real service to the artist. By their help he could supplement the inadequacy of his technique. It was obviously easier to draw a cruciform nimbus round the head of the Christ than to show in His face the stamp of divinity. In the thirteenth century art could have done without such assistance. The artists at Amiens who clothed with so great majesty the Christ teaching at the door of their cathedral had no need of it (Fig. 2). The sculptors of Chartres knew how to express sanctity otherwise than by the use of the nimbus; a virginal grace envelops St. Modeste (Fig. 3) and the great soul of St. Martin shines in his face.[3] But faithful to the past the thirteenth century did not relinquish the old conventions, and deviated little from tradition. By that time the canons of religious art had grown to have almost the weight of articles of faith, and we find

[1] Probably the headdress of the Jews in the Middle Ages.

[2] On representations of the Last Supper, see *Bullet. monum.*, 1881, p. 312 *sq.*

[3] St. Modeste is in the north porch (exterior), St. Martin in the south porch (right doorway).

theologians consecrating the work of the craftsmen by their authority. In the *Summa* Aquinas devoted a chapter to the nimbus, and in it he explained why it is the usual symbol of holiness.[1] Art was considered as one form of the liturgy, and Gulielmus Durandus, a liturgiologist of the thirteenth century, introduced several detailed expositions of sacred works of art into his *Rationale divinorum officiorum.*[2]

FIG. 2.—HEAD OF CHRIST (Amiens)

It was well for the art of the thirteenth century that it did so piously preserve the rudiments of this ancient symbolism, for by that means it attained the grandeur peculiar to works to which successive centuries had contributed. There was in art a something impersonal and profound, and one might say that such or such an attitude, such or such a symbolic grouping was the common choice. Surely it was not individual choice but the corporate Christian consciousness which lighted upon that sublime gesture of the Saviour when on the Day of Judgment He shows His wounds to mankind. The mind of the theologian, the instinct of the people and the keen sensibility of the artist all collaborated.

Mediæval art is like mediæval literature, its value lies less in conscious talent than in diffused genius. The personality of the artist does not always appear, but countless generations of men speak through his mouth, and the individual, even when mediocre, is lifted by the genius of these Christian centuries. At the Renaissance artists at considerable risk and peril freed themselves from tradition. The lesser men found it difficult to escape platitude and to attain significance in their religious work, while the great ones were no greater than the old masters who had submissively given naïve expression to the thought of the Middle Ages. Following an accepted model it was possible for even a modest artist to produce a work which made a strong emotional appeal. One may well prefer the traditional

[1] *Sum. Theol.*, Supplement to part III. *Quaest.*, 96. See also Vincent of Beauvais, *Spec. histor.*, lib. I., cap. 51.

[2] G. Durandus, *Rat. div. offic.*, lib. I., cap. 3.

Christ of the Gothic cathedrals showing His wounds to mankind to the vengeful Judge whom the genius of a Michelangelo, unhampered by tradition, conceived as cursing the lost.

FIG. 3.—ST. MODESTE (Chartres)

II

The second characteristic of mediæval iconography is obedience to the rules of a kind of sacred mathematics. Position, grouping, symmetry and number are of extraordinary importance.

To begin with, the whole church is oriented from the rising to the setting sun, a custom dating back to primitive Christian days for it is found even in the *Apostolical Constitutions.*[1] In the thirteenth century Gulielmus Durandus cites this as a rule without exception :—"The foundations must be disposed in such a manner that the head of the church lies exactly to the east, that is to the part of the sky in which the sun rises at the equinox."[2] And, as a matter of fact, from the eleventh to the sixteenth century it is difficult to find a badly oriented church. Like other traditions of mediæval art the rule fell into neglect towards the time of the Council of Trent, the Jesuits being the first to violate it.

Each cardinal point has its significance in churches oriented in this way. The north, region of cold and darkness, is usually consecrated to the Old Testament, and the south, bathed in warm sunlight, is devoted to the New, though there are many exceptions to the rule.[3] The western façade —where the setting sun lights up the great scene of the evening of the

[1] Κατ' ἀνατολὰς τετραμμένος (οἶκος), *Const. apost.*, II. 57. Migne, *Patrol. gr.*, i., col. 724

[2] G. Durandus, *Ration.* Lyons, 1672, 8vo, lib. I., cap. 1.

[3] It was scrupulously observed at Chartres. The heroes of the Old Covenant are sculptured in the north porch, those of the New in the south porch. In Notre Dame at Paris the great rose-window to the north is devoted to the Old Testament, that to the south to the New. At Reims the rose-window to the north (mutilated) again shows scenes from the Old Testament (the Creation, Adam, Cain, Abel, &c.), that to the south (restored in the sixteenth century, but doubtless on the old model) is filled with figures of Christ and the apostles.

It is curious that the rule is still observed in the

world's history—is almost invariably reserved for a representation of the Last Judgment.[1] The mediæval doctors, with their curiously bad etymology, connected *occidens* with the verb *occidere*, and the west became for them the region of death.[2]

After orientation it was relative position which most engrossed the artist, here again at one with the theologian. In early times certain passages in the Bible led to the belief that the right hand was the place of honour. Is it not written, for example, in the Psalms: "Adstitit regina a dextris tuis in vestitu deaurato?" In the *Shepherd* of Hermas which belongs to primitive Christian literature, the right is the place given to those who are marked out for honour. In the account of the third vision[3] it is said that the Church caused Hermas to be seated on a bench at her side. When he would have seated himself to her right she signed to him to pass to the left, because the right is reserved for those who have suffered in the name of God. The mediæval theologians in their turn laid great stress on the dignity of the right hand place,[4] and the artists did not fail to conform to so well established a doctrine. When, for example, the Saviour is represented in the midst of His apostles, St. Peter—first in dignity—occupies a place to the right of the Master.[5] In the same way in the scene of the Crucifixion or in that of the Last Judgment, the Virgin is to the right, St. John to the left.

Again, the higher place was considered more honourable than the lower, and from this some curious compositions resulted. Of these the most

fifteenth century. At St. Ouen at Rouen and at St. Serge at Angers the windows to the north portray the prophets, those to the south the apostles. The practice was also known to the East. In the monastery of Salamis the Old Testament is to the left, that is to the north, and the New to the right, the south. See Didron and Durand, *Iconographie chrétienne. Traduction du manuscrit byzantin du Mont Athos*. Paris, 1845, 8vo, p. xi. On the symbolism of the north and south see especially G. Durand, *Ration.*, lib. IV., cap. xxiii., xxiv.; and Rabanus Maurus, *De Universo*, ix., *Prol.* "auster sancta Ecclesia est fidei calore accensa."

[1] The west front of almost all the great cathedrals, and a few rose-windows to the west (rose-window at Chartres, at St. Radegonde at Poitiers, &c.).

[2] The *Hortus deliciarum* of the abbess Herrade; see *Bibl. de l'École des Chartes*, vol. I. p. 246. In the Carolingian epoch the *Carmina Sangallensia* place the Last Judgment to the west; see Julius von Schlosser in *Quellenschriften für Kunstgeschichte*, vol. iv. p. 328. Vienna, 1892.

[3] Hermas, lib. I., vis. iii., Latin text in Migne, *Patrol. gr.*, ii.; Greek text in Tischendorf, Leipzig, 1856. The Middle Age was acquainted with the Latin version of the *Shepherd* of Hermas, and until the fifteenth century it is sometimes found at the end of the New Testament.

[4] See especially Peter Damian, *Opuscula*, xxxv., *Patrol. lat.*, cxlv., col. 589.

[5] There are a few exceptions to prove the rule. In the great porch at Amiens, for example, St. Paul is to the right of Christ and St. Peter to the left. This arrangement takes us back to primitive Christian art. In early times St. Paul was placed to the right and St. Peter to the left of Christ to mark the substitution of the Gentile for the Jew. This is the reason given even in the twelfth century by Peter Damian in a treatise he wrote on representations of the two chief apostles (*Patrol.*, cxlv.). St. Paul, he said, placed the hosts of the Gentiles on the right hand of God. And he adds, St. Paul was of the tribe of Benjamin, and Benjamin means "son of the right hand." The old doctrine is perpetuated in the papal bull, where St. Paul is seen to the right and St. Peter to the left of the Cross.

striking is that of the figure of Christ in Majesty supported by the four beasts of the Apocalypse. The four beasts, symbols of the evangelists as we shall show later, were placed according to the excellence of their natures—man, eagle, lion and ox. When it was a question of disposing them in a tympanum, the dignity conferred by the higher and that conferred by the right hand place had to be taken into consideration. The following arrangement was the one generally adopted. The winged man was placed

FIG. 4.—THE CRUCIFEROUS NIMBUS, THE AUREOLE, AND THE FOUR EMBLEMS OF THE EVANGELISTS (tympanum at Chartres)

at the top of the composition and to the right of Christ, the eagle at the top to the left, the lion at the bottom to the right, the ox at the bottom to the left[1] (Fig. 4).

Regard for the traditional order is especially evident when it is a question of representing the blessed who compose the Church Triumphant. On the Portail du Jugement of Notre Dame at Paris the saints ranged in the orders of the arch form, as in Dante's Divine Comedy, concentric bands round the figure of Christ. The ranks of patriarchs, prophets, confessors, martyrs and virgins are seen in succession. Such a classification conforms to that adopted in the liturgy.[2] At Chartres the artist went further, and in the right bay of the south porch—which is entirely devoted to confessors—

[1] Old porch at Chartres.

[2] At Notre Dame, however, the confessors are placed before the martyrs.

the saints round the arches are classified as laymen, monks, priests, bishops and archbishops. A saintly Pope and a saintly Emperor occupy the crown of the arch, and seem to be the two keystones of the structure.[1]

FIG. 5.—BALAAM SUPPORTED BY HIS ASS, THE QUEEN OF SHEBA BY A NEGRO (north porch, Chartres)

Above the choirs of saints are the choirs of angels. These are frequently ranked by the artists in the order devised by St. Dionysius the Areopagite, who first described the invisible world with the precision and grandeur found later in Dante.[2] His *Celestial Hierarchy*, translated into Latin in the ninth century by Scotus Eriugena, was often expounded by the doctors, notably by Hugh of St. Victor.[3] It inspired the artists who carved the nine choirs of angels in the south porch at Chartres. They are there ranged in the following orders: Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, Dominations, Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Archangels and Angels.[4] All these celestial beings, according to the doctrine of the Areopagite, form as it were great luminous circles round the throne of God, their brilliance increasing in measure as they approach the source of all light.[5] So at Chartres the Seraphim and Cherubim carry flames and balls of fire because they dwell nearest to the centre of heat and splendour.

In the art of the Middle Ages care for disposition of parts extended to the smallest detail and led to ingenious devices. For example, a little crouching figure is almost always found under the bracket which supports a large statue. The superficial observer sees in it a piece of pure decoration, but careful study has shown that each of such small figures is in vital relation to the figure above it. Apostles tread under foot the kings who persecuted them, Moses stands on the golden calf, the angels tread on

[1] See Bulteau, *Monographie de la cathédrale de Chartres*, vol. ii. p. 358. Chartres, 1891, 8vo. This fine monograph is in three volumes. The Abbé Bulteau had previously published a complete study of the cathedral of Chartres in one volume, *Description de la cathédrale de Chartres*. Chartres, 1850, 8vo.

[2] Dante placed Dionysius the Areopagite in the Paradiso (x., 115–117).

[3] *Patrol.*, cxxii., col. 638, and clxxv., col. 923.

[4] The Abbé Bulteau (*op. cit.*, p. 313 *sq.*) adopts a rather different sequence, but it is evident that he is mistaken. The figure armed with a lance and shield, treading the dragon under foot, obviously represents the order of Archangels and not the Virtues.

[5] Rabanus Maurus, *De Universo*, i. 5, *Patrol.*, cxi., col. 29. "et ideo quantum vicinius (angeli) coram Deo consistunt, tanto magis claritate divini luminis inflammantur."

the dragon of the abyss, and Christ tramples on the adder and the basilisk. At times the emblem on the bracket does not connote triumph, but relates to some feature in the life or character of the hero. At Chartres Balaam has his ass beneath his feet, the Queen of Sheba has a negro bearing gifts from Ophir (Fig. 5), while beneath the figure of the Virgin is the burning bush[1] (Fig. 6). The connection between the statue and the figure beneath the bracket is so close that at Notre Dame at Paris it has been possible by the help of the storied supports to reconstruct almost to a certainty the large figures in the left doorway.[2]

FIG. 6.—THE VIRGIN WITH THE BURNING BUSH BENEATH HER FEET (north porch, Chartres)

But no disposition met with more favour than that controlled by symmetry. Symmetry was regarded as the expression of a mysterious inner harmony. Craftsmen opposed the twelve patriarchs and twelve prophets of the Ancient Law to the twelve apostles of the New,[3] and the four major prophets to the four evangelists. A window in the south transept at Chartres shows—with audacious symbolism—the four prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Jeremiah bearing on their shoulders the four evangelists, St. Matthew, St. John, St. Mark, St. Luke[4] (Fig. 7). In this way the artist would tell us that although the evangelists rest upon the prophets, yet from their spiritual vantage-ground they have a wider outlook. The four and twenty elders of the Apocalypse frequently correspond to the twelve prophets and the twelve apostles. In the same way parallelism was employed when treating of the Virtues and the Liberal Arts.[5]

Schemes of this kind presuppose a reasoned belief in the virtue of

[1] The Virgin of the Visitation in the north porch.

[2] Façade, porch of the Coronation of the Virgin. On the pedestals in this porch, see Cahier, *Nouv. mél. d'archéol.: (ivoires, miniatures,* &c.), p. 237; and Duchalais, *Mémoires de la Société des antiquaires de France*, t. xvi.

[3] On this concordance see the commentary on Genesis attributed to Eucherius (*Patrol.*, l. col. 923) and Isidore of Seville, *Liber numer.*, *Patrol.*, lxxxiii., col. 192. In the windows in the cathedral of Lyons prophets, apostles and patriarchs are opposed (two patriarchs are missing). Some of these are reproduced in L. Bégule and C. Guigue's *Monographie de la cathédrale de Lyon*. Lyons, 1880, folio.

[4] The same subject was carved on the porch of the cathedral of Bamberg, probably under French influence.

[5] Windows in the apse of the cathedral of Auxerre. The Arts are in one rose-window, the Virtues in another, in equal numbers.

numbers, and in fact the Middle Ages never doubted that numbers were endowed with some occult power. This doctrine came from the Fathers of the Church, who inherited it from those Neo-Platonic schools in which the genius of Pythagoras had lived again. It is evident that St. Augustine considered numbers as thoughts of God. In many passages he lays it down that each number has its divine significance. "The Divine Wisdom is reflected in the numbers impressed on all things."[1] The construction of the physical and moral worlds alike is based on eternal numbers. We feel that the charm of the dance lies in rhythm, that is in number; but we must go further, beauty is itself a cadence, harmonious number.[2] The science of numbers, then, is the science of the universe, and from numbers we learn its secret. Therefore the numbers met with in the Bible should be considered with reverent attention, for they are sacred and full of mystery.[3] He who can read them enters into the divine plan.

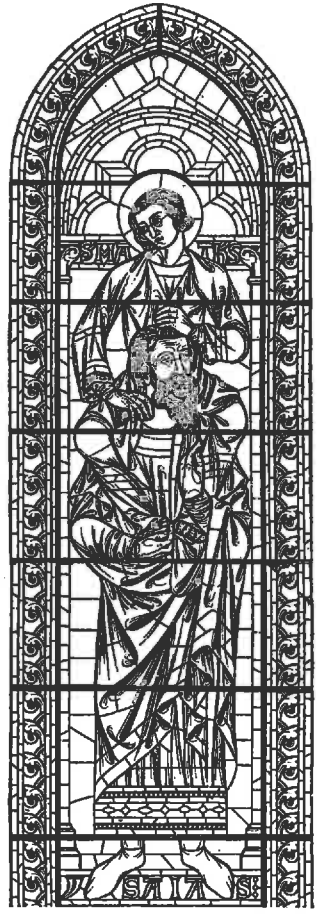

FIG. 7.—ISAIAH BEARING ST. MATTHEW (window at Chartres)

The same ideas are found in the works of almost all the mediæval doctors. Reference to the *Liber formularum* of Eucherius for the fifth century, to the *Liber numerorum* of Isidore of Seville for the seventh, to the *De Universo* of Rabanus Maurus for the ninth, and to the *Miscellanea* of Hugh of St. Victor for the twelfth will suffice to show how the same teaching couched in precisely the same terms was transmitted through the centuries.[4] The symbolic meaning of each number is first dogmatically stated, to be sub-

[1] St. Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, lib. II., cap. xvi. *Patrol.*, vol. xxxii., col. 1263.

[2] *Id., ibid.*

[3] St. Augustine, *Quaest. in Heptateuch.*; *Patrol.*, vol. xxxvi.-xxxvii., col. 589; see also St. Augustine's treatise *De Musica*, chapter "De numeris spiritualibus et æternis," vi. xii., *Patrol.*, vol. xxxii., col. 1181.

[4] Eucherius, *Patrol.*, vol. l.; Isid. of Seville, *Patrol.*, vol. lxxxiii.; Rabanus Maurus, *Patrol.*, cxi.; Hugh of St. Victor, *Patrol.*, clxxvii.

sequently verified by the examination of passages of Scripture in which numbers appear. The interpretations do not vary, and one feels oneself in the presence of a body of doctrine.

A few examples will give some idea of the method. From St. Augustine onwards all theologians interpreted the meaning of the number twelve after the same fashion. Twelve is the number of the universal Church, and it was for profound reasons that Jesus willed the number of His apostles should be twelve. Now twelve is the product of three by four. Three, which is the number of the Trinity and by consequence of the soul made in the image of the Trinity, connotes all spiritual things. Four, the number of the elements, is the symbol of material things—the body and the world—which result from combinations of the four elements.[1] To multiply three by four is in the mystic sense to infuse matter with spirit, to proclaim the truths of the faith to the world, to establish the universal Church of which the apostles are the symbol.[2]

Computations of this kind were often more than ingenious, and at times reached real grandeur. The number seven, regarded by the Fathers as mysterious above all others, intoxicated the mediæval mystic. It was observed first of all that seven—composed of four, the number of the body, and of three, the number of the soul—is pre-eminently the number of humanity, and expresses the union of man's double nature. All that relates to him is ordered in series of sevens. Human life is divided into seven ages with each of which is associated the practice of one of the seven virtues. The grace necessary for the practice of these seven virtues is gained by addressing to God the seven petitions of the Paternoster. The seven sacraments sustain man in the exercise of the seven virtues, and guard him from falling into the seven deadly sins.[3] The number seven thus expresses the harmony of man's nature, but it also expresses the harmonious relation of man to the universe. The seven planets govern human destiny, for each of the seven ages is under the influence of one of them. Thus seven invisible threads connect man with the scheme of the universe.[4] Now

[1] St. Augustine, *In Psalm.*, vi.; *Patrol.*, vol. xxxvi.–xxxvii., col. 91. "Numerus ternarius ad animum pertinet, quaternarius ad corpus," and Hugh of St. Victor, *Patrol.*, vol. clxxv., col. 22.

[2] On the number twelve see Rabanus Maurus, *De Universo*, xviii. 3; *Patrol.*, vol. cxi., "Item duodecim ad omnium sanctorum pertinent sacramentum, qui, ex quatuor mundi partibus per fidem Trinitatis electi, unam ex se faciunt ecclesiam"; and Hugh of St. Victor, *De scripturis et script. sacris*, *Patrol.*, vol. clxxv., col. 22.

[3] On the number seven see Hugh of St. Victor, *Exposit. in Abdiam*, *Patrol.*, vol. clxxv., col. 400 *sq.*

[4] Subtle and learned Italy connected the planets with the seven ages of man on the capitals of the Ducal Palace at Venice, and in the frescoes in the Eremitani at Padua. *Annales archéol.*, t. xvi. pp. 66, 197, 297. The frescoes, the work of Guarienti, belong to the fourteenth century. After birth the child is under the influence of the Moon, who governs him for four years. Then Mercury adopts him, and influences him for ten years. Venus takes him for seven years.

the beautiful symphony made by man and the world, the music they offer to God, will last for seven periods of time, of which six have already passed. By creating the world in seven days God gave man the key to these mysteries,[1] and the Church celebrates the sublimity of the Creator's plan when she sings His praises seven times a day.[2] Finally, when all is said and done, what are the seven tones of the Gregorian mode but a sensible expression of the universal harmony.[3]

There is no doubt that the mystical schools in particular were led astray by conceptions of this kind. A glance at the *Arca Noe* of Hugh of St. Victor gives some idea of the rapture with which such symbolic numbers were combined.

But apart from the mystics there was hardly a mediæval theologian who did not seek in number the revelation of hidden truth. Some of their computations vividly recall those of the Cabbala. Honorius of Autun, when wishing to explain why the soul unites with the body forty-six days after conception, takes the name of Adam, and shows that the number forty-six is therein written. The transposition into numbers of the Greek letters composing the name gives: $\alpha=1$, $\delta=4$, $\alpha=1$, $\mu=40$, *i.e.* 46, which represents the time at which the human being may be considered as formed.[4]

Among the doctors, the commentators on the Bible are the richest in mystical interpretations based on numbers. They tell us, for example, that if Gideon went forth with three hundred companions it was not without some hidden reason, for that number hides a mystery. In Greek three hundred is rendered by the letter *tau* (T); now T is the figure of the Cross, and so behind Gideon and his companions must be seen the vision of Christ and the Cross.[5]

Many examples of similar deductions might be given, but it is enough to

The Sun then governs man for nineteen years, Mars for fifteen, Jupiter for twelve, and Saturn till his death. All these traditions go back to classical times.

[1] On the symbolism of the seven Days of Creation, see Rabanus Maurus, *De Universo*, ix. 10.

[2] On the symbolism of the seven hours of the office, see G. Durandus, *Ration.*, v. i.

[3] The seven tones (with the octave) are carved on capitals from the abbey of Cluny (to-day in the museum of that town). They were very probably connected, if one may judge by some other capitals, with the seven virtues and the seven ages of the world. See *Annales archéol.*, t. xxvi. 380, and t. xxvii. 32, 151, 287.

[4] Honorius of Autun, *Sacramentarium*, *Patrol.*, vol. clxxii., col. 741. The four letters in the name of Adam also (according to Honorius) represent the four first letters of the four cardinal points—anatolé (east), dysis (west), arktos (north), mesembria (south). It is hardly necessary to say that Honorius of Autun was not the inventor of these combinations of numbers and letters, which are very ancient.

[5] Walafrid Strabo, *Glossa ordin. Lib. Judic.*, VII., v. 6. The same doctrine is found in St. Augustine, *Quæst. in Heptat.*, lib. vii. xxxvii.; and in Rabanus Maurus, *Comment. in Lib. Judic.*, lii., *Patrol.*, vol. cviii., col. 1163.

have indicated a peculiar characteristic of mediæval thought. It might truly be said that there was something of this sacred arithmetic in all the great works of the Middle Ages. Dante's "Divine Comedy" is the most famous example, for it is built up on numbers. To the nine circles of Hell correspond the nine terraces of the mount of Purgatory and the nine heavens of Paradise. In that inspired poem nothing was left solely to inspiration. Dante determined that each part of his trilogy should be divided into thirty-three cantos in honour of the thirty-three years of the life of Christ.[1] In adopting the metrical form of the terzina he seems to have wished that the pre-eminently mystic number should enter into the very texture of his poem. He disposed the universe according to the laws of a sublime geometry. He placed the earthly Paradise at the antipodes of Jerusalem so that the tree which caused man's fall was exactly opposite to the Cross through which he gained salvation. The same precision of detail is observed throughout. The most ardent imagination known in literature was also the most submissive. Dante accepted the law of numbers as a divine rhythm which the universe obeyed. But while meditating on the mystery he was seized with a sacred awe from which sprang a marvellous poem. Beatrice herself became a number. She was in his eyes the number nine, which has its root in the holy Trinity.[2]

It was thus that "cum pondere et mensura," Dante raised his invisible cathedral. With St. Thomas he was the great architect of the thirteenth century, and might well be represented holding compass and rule such as may be seen on the tombstone of Maître Hugues Libergier the builder of St. Nicaise at Reims.

After all that has been said it would seem natural to look for traces of this sacred arithmetic in the cathedrals. Though the science of numbers was often at the root of the artists' compositions, yet we are far from seeing symbolic numbers everywhere. For example, nothing goes to prove, as certain adventurous archæologists would have it, that a mystical meaning is to be sought in the triple division of the Gothic window.[3] But neither would we join hands with the opposite school, and by systematically rejecting all symbolism of the kind show misunderstanding of the real genius of the Middle Ages.

[1] The *Inferno* has thirty-four cantos, but the first must be considered as a prologue.

[2] *Vita Nuova*. "This lady was accompanied by the number nine, to give to understand that she was a nine; that is, a miracle whose root is the wondrous Trinity alone."

[3] See J. M. Neale and Benj. Webb, *The symbolism of churches and church ornaments*. 1843.

There are cases in which symbolic intention can hardly be questioned, such is the close agreement between the work of writer and craftsman. The octagonal form of the baptismal font, adopted from the earliest times and persisting through the whole of the Middle Ages, is not due to mere caprice. It is difficult not to see in it an application of the teaching of the Fathers, for the number eight was to them the number of the new life. It comes after seven which marks the limit assigned to the life of man and to the duration of the world. The number eight is like the octave in music with which all begins once more. It is the symbol of the new life, of the final resurrection and of that anticipated resurrection implied in baptism.[1]

We cannot believe that such a doctrine, taught by the early Fathers, persisted without effect. The font in the oldest baptisteries in Italy or Gaul was almost invariably octagonal in form,[2] and in mediæval times the baptismal fonts though frequently circular were still more frequently octagonal.[3]

We believe that it would be possible to find mystical numbers in other parts of the cathedral, but such studies are still in their infancy and so far more imagination than method has been brought to bear on them.

III

The third characteristic of mediæval art lies in this, that it is a symbolic code. From the days of the catacombs Christian art has spoken in figures, showing men one thing and inviting them to see in it the figure of another. The artist, as the doctors might have put it, must imitate God who under the letter of Scripture hid profound meaning, and who willed that nature too should hold lessons for man.

In mediæval art there are then intentions a knowledge of which is necessary to any real understanding of the subject. When for example in scenes of the Last Judgment we see the Wise and Foolish Virgins to

[1] St. Ambrose says, "Quis autem dubitet majus esse octavæ munus, quae totum renovavit hominem." *Epist. class.*, i. xliv., *Patrol.*, vol. xvi., col. 1140. Elsewhere he remarks that the number eight, which under the Old Law related to circumcision, now relates to baptism and to the resurrection. *In Psal. David*, cxviii., *Patrol.*, vol. xv., col. 1198.

[2] For example, the baptisteries at Ravenna, Novara, Cividale in Friuli, Trieste, Torcello, Aix (Provence), Fréjus, &c. See Lenoir, *Architecture monastique*. Paris, 1852, 2 vols. 8vo. No passage on the form of the baptistery is to be found in the Fathers of the Church. I have searched in vain in St. Augustine, St. Ambrose, and St. Gregory the Great. Support from them would settle the question, but their silence by no means condemns our hypothesis.

[3] On mediæval fonts see the study made by M. Saintenoy in the *Annales de la Société archéolog. de Bruxelles*, 1891 and 1892. He studied and classified a large number of baptismal fonts of the eleventh to the sixteenth century in all parts of Europe. Thirty-two are round, but sixty-seven are octagonal. There are other shapes, but they are few in number.

the right and left hand of Christ, we should thereby understand that they symbolise the elect and the lost. Upon this all the commentators on the New Testament are agreed, and they explain it by stating that the five Foolish Virgins typify the desires of the five senses, and the five Wise Virgins the five forms of the contemplative life.[1] To take another example, it is not as rivers that the four rivers of Paradise—the Gihon, Phison, Tigris, and Euphrates—are represented pouring water from their urns towards the four points of the compass, but as symbols of the evangelists who flooded the world with their teaching like four beneficent streams.

An Old Testament personage in the porch of a cathedral is but a type, an adumbration of Christ, the Virgin, or the future Church. At Chartres the form of Melchizedek, priest and king, bearing the bread and wine to Abraham, should remind men of another priest and king who offered bread and wine to His disciples. At Laon Gideon calling down rain from heaven on to the fleece he had laid on the earth, reminds men that the Virgin Mother was this symbolic fleece on whom fell the dew from on high (Fig. 8).

A detail of apparent insignificance may hide symbolic meaning. In a window at Bourges the lion near to the tomb from which the risen Christ comes forth is a type of the Resurrection. It was generally believed in the Middle Ages that for three days after birth the cubs of the lioness gave no sign of life, but that on the third day the lion came and with his breath restored them to life. And so the apparent death of the lion represents the sojourn of Jesus in the tomb, and its birth was an image of the Resurrection.

In the art of the Middle Ages, as we see, everything depicted is informed by a quickening spirit.

Such a conception of art implies a profoundly idealistic view of the scheme of the universe, and the conviction that both history and nature must be regarded as vast symbols. We shall see later that this undoubtedly was the view of the mediæval mind. Further, it should be remembered that such ideas were not the property of the great thirteenth century doctors alone, but were shared by the mass of the people to whom they had permeated through the teaching of the Church. The symbolism of the church services familiarised the faithful with the symbolism of art. Christian liturgy like Christian art is endless symbolism, both are manifestations of the same genius.

[1] We shall return to this subject later, and give references.

The commentaries of Gulielmus Durandus accompanying the account of any of the great Christian festivals—such for example as Easter Eve[1]—show how each ceremony performed on that day is full of meaning.

The day begins with the extinction of all the lamps in the church to show how the Ancient Law which has hitherto given light to the world

FIG. 8.—GIDEON AND THE FLEECE (window at Laon)
(From Florival and Midoux, by permission of M. de Florival)

is now discarded. The celebrant then blesses the new fire, type of the New Law. This fire must be struck from a flint in remembrance that Christ, as St. Paul says, is the world's cornerstone. Then the bishop, the deacon and the people move towards the choir and stop in front of the paschal candle. This candle, Gulielmus Durandus teaches, is a threefold symbol. When extinguished it typifies at once the pillar of cloud which led the Children of Israel by day, the Ancient Law, and the body of the Lord; when lighted it signifies the pillar of fire which was Israel's

[1] *Rationale div. offic.*, lib. VI., cap. lxxx.

guide by night, the New Law, and the glorious body of the risen Christ. The deacon alludes to this threefold symbolism when singing the *Exultet* before the candle, but he insists in particular upon the likeness of the candle to the body of the Saviour. He calls to mind that the pure wax was produced by the bee which, like the Virgin who gave birth to the Saviour, is at once chaste and fruitful.[1] To give visible form to the similitude of the wax to the sacred body, he drives five grains of incense into the candle as a reminder both of the five wounds of Christ and of the spices brought by the holy women for His burial. Finally he lights the candle with the new fire, and the lamps are re-lighted throughout the church in token of the illumination of the world by the New Law.

The first part of the ceremony ends here. The second is devoted to the baptism of the neophytes, which the Church ordained should take place on that day because, says Durandus, she saw mystic affinities between the death of Jesus and the symbolic death of the new Christian who in baptism dies to the world to rise again with the Saviour. But before being led to the baptismal fonts the catechumens listen to twelve passages from the Bible dealing with the sacrament they are about to receive. These are, to give examples, the story of the Deluge whose water purified the world, the passage of the Red Sea by the Children of Israel (a figure of baptism), and the verse in Isaiah which speaks of those who thirst for the water of life. The reading ended, the bishop blesses the water. He first makes the sign of the cross above it, then dividing it into four he sprinkles it towards the four cardinal points in memory of the four rivers of the terrestrial Paradise. He next dips the paschal candle, type of Christ, into the water to remind them that Jesus was baptized in Jordan, and by His baptism sanctified all the waters of the world. He dips the candle into the font three times in remembrance of the three days passed by the Redeemer in the tomb. The baptism then begins, and the neophytes in their turn are dipped three times into the font that they may know that with Christ they die to the world, with Him are buried, and with Him rise to the life eternal.

It is evident that in such a ceremony no detail is without symbolic value.

But it is not only on special occasions such as this that the Church makes use of symbols to instruct and move the people. Daily she celebrates the sacrifice of the Mass, and in that solemn drama every detail has its

[1] On the beautiful *Exultet* of the primitive Church see Duchesne, *Les Origines du culte chrétien*. Paris, 1889, 8vo, p. 242.

significance. The chapters which Gulielmus Durandus gives to the explanation of the Mass are among the most arresting in his *Rationale*.

Here, for example, is his interpretation of the first part of the divine sacrifice:[1] The ceremony begins with the *Introït*, that solemn chant which expresses the waiting of patriarchs and prophets. The choir of clergy is the very choir of the saints of the Ancient Law who sigh for the coming of the Messiah whom they will never see. The bishop then enters, appearing as the living type of Christ, and his arrival symbolises the coming of the Saviour awaited by the nations. Before him at great festivals are carried seven lights to recall the seven gifts of the Spirit which rested upon the head of the Son of God, according to the word of the prophet. He advances under a triumphal canopy whose four bearers may be compared to the four evangelists. To right and left of him walk acolytes, typifying Moses and Elias, who were seen on Mount Tabor on either side of the transfigured Lord. They teach men that the authority of both the Law and the Prophets was embodied in Christ. The bishop seats himself on his throne and is silent, appearing to take no share in the first part of the ceremony. His attitude contains a lesson, for by his silence he recalls that the first years of the life of Jesus were passed in obscurity and meditation. The sub-deacon, however, goes to the desk, and turning to the right he reads the Epistle aloud. Here we catch a glimpse of the first act in the drama of Redemption, for the reading of the Epistle typifies the preaching of John the Baptist in the desert. He speaks before the Saviour has begun His mission, but he speaks to the Jews alone, and the sub-deacon—type of the Forerunner—turns to the north, the side of the Old Law. The reading ended, he bows to the bishop as John the Baptist abased himself before his Master.

The Gradual, which follows the reading of the Epistle, also relates to the mission of the Baptist. It symbolises the exhortation to repentance which he addressed to the Jews on the eve of the new era.

At this point the celebrant reads the Gospel. A solemn moment, for it is now that the active life of the Messiah begins, and His word is first heard in the world. The reading of the Gospel is itself the figure of His preaching.

The Creed follows the Gospel, as faith follows the proclamation of the

[1] We give a short résumé, omitting a number of details, of chapter v. and the following chapters of the *Rationale*, bk. iv. The same teaching is found in other mediæval liturgiologists. See Sicard, *Mitrale*, III. 2; *Patrol.*, ccxiii.

truth. The twelve articles of the Creed relate to the mission of the apostles.[1]

The Creed finished, the bishop rises and speaks to the people. In choosing this moment to instruct the faithful the Church would remind them of the miracle of her foundation. She shows them how the truth first received by the apostles instantly began to spread throughout the world.

Such is the mystical meaning which Gulielmus Durandus attributes to the first part of the Mass. The foregoing has been in the nature of a prologue to the drama which culminates in the divine sacrifice, but his comments now become so numerous and his symbolism so rich that it is impossible to give any adequate idea in a mere outline, and we would refer the reader to the original. We have said enough, however, to give some notion of the genius of the Middle Ages, and one can divine something of the teaching, the emotional appeal, and the inspiration which religious ceremonial held for the Christian of the thirteenth century. How powerfully would such poetry affect the sensitive soul of a St. Louis, and how readily does it furnish the explanation of his trances and tears. To those who would tear him from his meditation he was wont to say in a low voice, like one half-dreaming, "Where am I?" He had thought himself with St. John in the wilderness, or walking by the side of the Master.

The works of the old liturgiologists, despised since the seventeenth century, should without doubt be counted among the most extraordinary books belonging to the Middle Ages.[2] Nowhere else is found such forceful radiance of soul, which transmuted things material into things of the spirit.

The vestments worn by the priest at the altar and the objects used in the ritual of the church are so many symbols. The chasuble, worn over the other vestments, is the charity which is above the precepts of the law, and is itself the supreme law.[3] The stole which the priest passes round

[1] Each article of the Creed was attributed to an apostle. From the fourteenth century onwards the apostles are often shown carrying scrolls on which are written the articles attributed to each of them.

[2] Read Amalarius, *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, and *Eclogae de officio missae* (ninth century), *Patrol.*, cv.; Rupert of Tuy, *De divinis officiis* (twelfth century), *Patrol.*, clxx.; Honorius of Autun, *Gemma animae*, and *Sacramentarium* (twelfth century), *Patrol.*, clxxii.; Hugh of St. Victor, *Speculum ecclesiæ*, and *De officiis ecclesiasticis* (twelfth century; the attribution to Hugh of St. Victor is doubtful), *Patrol.*, clxxvii.; Sicard of Cremona, *Mitrale* (twelfth century), *Patrol.*, ccxiii.; Innocent III., *De sacro altaris mysterio* (thirteenth century), *Patrol.*, ccxvii. At the end of the thirteenth century G. Durandus compiled and added to the work of his predecessors in his *Rationale divinorum officiorum*. It is curious that the earlier liturgiologists, such as Isidore of Seville (*De ecclesiasticis officiis*, *Patrol.*, lxxxiii.), give no place to symbolism. The symbolic interpretation of ritual belongs to the Middle Ages, and begins with Amalarius.

[3] G. Durandus, *Ration.*, bk. iii. ch. 7.

his neck is the light yoke of the Master, and as it is written that the Christian should cherish that yoke, the priest when putting it on or taking it off kisses the stole.[1] The bishop's mitre with its two points symbolises the knowledge he should have of both the Old and the New Testaments, while the two ribbons attached to it are a reminder that the interpretation of Scripture should be according to both letter and spirit.[2] The sanctus bell is the voice of the preachers. The frame to which it is suspended is a figure of the Cross, and the cord made of three twisted threads signifies the threefold interpretation of Scripture, in a historical, allegorical and moral sense. When the cord is taken in the hand in order to move the bell, it is a symbolic expression of the fundamental truth that the knowledge of the Scriptures should conduce to action.[3]

Such constant use of symbolism will astonish those unfamiliar with mediæval writers. One should not however affect to see in it, as did the Benedictines of the eighteenth century, nothing but the mere play of individual fancy.[4] Symbolic interpretations were doubtless never accepted as dogma, but for all that it is noticeable that they seldom vary. For example, in the thirteenth century Gulielmus Durandus attributes the same meaning to the stole as does Amalarius in the ninth.[5] But the interest here lies less in the interpretation itself than in the attitude of mind which it presupposes. What is significant is the scorn for things of sense, and the profound conviction that reaching out to the immaterial through the material man may have fleeting visions of God. And herein lies the true genius of the Middle Ages.

For the historian of art there are no books of greater value than the liturgical treatises, as through them he may learn to understand the spirit which moulded plastic art. The craftsmen were as skilful as the theologians in spiritualising material objects. To them were due devices which were at times ingenious, at times touching, at others impressive. They gave, for example, the form of a fortified town protected by towers to the great chandelier at Aix-la-Chapelle. The inscription tells us that this town of light is the celestial Jerusalem. Between the battlements, near to the apostles and prophets who guard the holy city,[6] are personifications of the

[1] *Ration.*, bk. iii. ch. 5.
[2] *Ration.*, bk. iii. ch. 13.
[3] *Ration.*, bk. i. ch. 4.
[4] See the article on Honorius of Autun in the *Hist. litt. de la France*, vol. xii.
[5] From Amalarius to G. Durandus all the liturgiologists consider the stole a symbol of obedience. Amalarius, *De eccles. officiis*, col. 1097; Rupert, *De divin. offic.*, col. 22; Honorius of Autun, *Gemma*, col. 605; Hugh of St. Victor, *De offic. eccles.*, col. 405; Sicard, *Mitrale*, col. 75; Innocent III., *De sacro alt. myst.*, col. 788.
[6] *Annales archéol.*, vol. xix. p. 70; and Cahier, *Mélang. arch.*, vol. iii. p. 1 *seq.*

beatitudes of the soul promised to the elect, a marvellous realisation of the vision of St. John.

The unknown artist who surmounted a censer with figures of the three Children in the fiery furnace was well able to give plastic form to beautiful thought.[1] The perfume which rose from the brazier was as the very prayer of the martyrs. Thus did the pious workman of the time express his deepest feelings in his work.

Another and more subtle artist gave to the crook of a bishop's crozier the form of a serpent holding a dove in its teeth, as a reminder to the pastor of the two virtues proper to his ministry. "Hide the simplicity of the dove under the prudence of the serpent," says a Latin inscription engraved on the pastoral staff.[2] Another crozier shows a serpent threatening the Virgin with his impotent jaws, while in the crook is an angel telling him that this is she whose Son will vanquish the serpent.[3]

The artists frequently gave a literal translation of the doctrine held by the liturgiologists. Against twelve pillars in the choir of the Sainte-Chapelle the sculptors placed twelve statues of apostles carrying consecration crosses. The liturgical writers taught[4] that when the bishop consecrated a church he should mark twelve columns in the nave or choir with twelve crosses in token that the twelve apostles are the true pillars of the temple. This is the symbolism which has been so well expressed in the interior of the Sainte-Chapelle[5] (Fig. 9).

FIG. 9.—AN APOSTLE WITH THE CONSECRATION CROSS (Sainte-Chapelle)

Again, in the thirteenth century, all the church furniture showed the

[1] Censer at Lille, *Annales archéol.*, vol. iv. p. 293, and xix. p. 112.
[2] Cahier, *Nouv. mél. archéol., Ivoires*, p. 28.
[3] In the Louvre, galerie d'Apollon.
[4] See Sicard, *Mitrale*, bk. i. ch. 9; *Patrol.*, tom. ccxiii. col. 34.
[5] With the exception of four, the statues now seen there have been restored (F. de Guilhermy, *Description de la Sainte-Chapelle*. Paris, 1887, 12mo, p. 41). The twelve apostles were also placed against twelve columns in the church of St. Jacques-des-Pèlerins, at Paris (*Rev. de l'art chrétien*, 1896, p. 399).

material fashioned by the spiritual. At the lectern the eagle of St. John spread his wings to support the Gospel.[1] Beautiful angels in long robes bore in procession the crystal reliquary in which reposed the bones of saints and martyrs. Ivory figures of the Virgin opened and where their hearts should be showed engraved the story of the Passion.[2] In the chevet of the cathedral a huge angel which dominated the whole town turned with the sun and gave a spiritual meaning to each hour.

From what has been said it is evident that mediæval art was before all things a symbolic art, in which form is used merely as the vehicle of spiritual meaning.[4]

Such are the general characteristics of the iconography of the Middle Ages. Art was at once a script, a calculus and a symbolic code. The result was a deep and perfect harmony. There is something musical in the grouping of the statues in the cathedral porches, and in truth all the elements of music are present. Are there not here conventional signs grouped according to the law of numbers, and is there not something of the indefinite quality of music in the infinite symbolism dimly discerned behind the outward forms? The genius of the Middle Ages, so long misunderstood, was a harmonious genius. Dante's Paradiso and the porches at Chartres are symphonies. To thirteenth century art more truly perhaps than to any other might be given the title of "frozen music."

[1] In the Chartreuse at Dijon the lectern was a column surmounted by a phœnix. The four beasts placed round it served as desk. If the gospel for the day came from St. Mark the book was placed on the lion, if from St. Luke on the ox, and so on (Moléon, *Voyage liturgique*, p. 156).

[2] A figure of the Virgin which opens formerly found in the collection of ivories at the Louvre, is probably a forgery. However an authentic work exists (much mutilated); see Molinier, *Ivoires*, p. 177, in *l'Histoire générale des arts appliqués à l'industrie*. Paris, 1896, folio. Another has recently been found; see *La Vierge ouvrante de Boubon*, by the Abbé Leclerc and Baron de Verneilh. Limoges, 1898.

[3] In the chevet of the cathedral of Chartres before the fire of 1836. Villard de Honnecourt in his *Album* (fol. 22 v.) explains the mechanism that put the angel in motion.

[4] A question which has given rise to lengthy controversy in mediæval archæology is that of the deviation of the axis of churches, so frequently noticed in the choir. Is such an irregularity due to chance, to necessities of a material order, or has it a symbolic intention? Was it not done in remembrance that Christ, of whom the church is an image, inclined His head when He died on the Cross? Viollet-le-Duc does not commit himself, though recognising that such an idea would be in harmony with all that we know of the genius of the Middle Ages (*Dictionn. raisonné de l'architect.*, article *Axe*). For my part I was long disposed to interpret the deviation of the axis in a mystical sense. The notable memoir that M. de Lasteyrie devoted to this question (*Mém. de l'Acad. des Inscript. et Belles-Lettres*, vol. xxxvii., 1905) has convinced me that this deviation could have no symbolic meaning. When not due to the necessities of the site, it resulted from an error in measurement, and always corresponds to a break in the work of building. The precise examples given by M. de Lasteyrie must surely remove all doubt. M. Anthyme Saint-Paul, so long one of the champions of symbolic interpretation, almost immediately on the publication of the *Mémoire* signified his adhesion to M. Lasteyrie's theory (*Bullet. monum.*, 1906). This symbolism discarded, what remains of the ingenious deductions of Mme. Félicie d'Ayzac who had tried to show that the small door in the side of Notre Dame at Paris, the *porte rouge*, was the figure of the wound made by the lance in the right side of Jesus (*Revue de l'art chrétien*, 1860 and 1861)? Symbolism has too large a place in mediæval art to leave room for the fancies of modern interpreters.

CHAPTER II

METHOD USED IN THE STUDY OF MEDIÆVAL ICONOGRAPHY

The Mirrors of Vincent of Beauvais

The thirteenth century was the century of encyclopædias. At no other period have so many works appeared bearing the titles of *Summa*, *Speculum* or *Imago Mundi*. It was in this century that Thomas Aquinas co-ordinated the whole body of Christian doctrine, Jacobus de Voragine collected the most famous legends of the saints, Gulielmus Durandus epitomised all previous writers on the liturgy, and Vincent of Beauvais attempted to embrace universal knowledge. Christianity came to full consciousness of its own genius, and the conception of the universe which had been elaborated by previous centuries received complete expression. It was believed to be possible to raise the final edifice of human knowledge, and in the universities which had recently been founded throughout Europe—above all the young university of Paris—the work was carried on with enthusiasm.

While the doctors were constructing the intellectual edifice which was to shelter the whole of Christendom, the cathedral of stone was rising as its visible counterpart. It too in its fashion was a *Speculum*, a *Summa*, an *Imago Mundi* into which the Middle Age put all its most cherished convictions. These great churches are the most perfect known expression in art of the mind of an epoch. We shall attempt to show that in them a whole dogmatic scheme found expression in concrete form.

The difficulty lies in grouping in logical sequence the innumerable works of art which the churches offer for our study. Surely we have hardly the right to dispose of the matter according to some arbitrary scheme which appears to us harmonious. It is necessary to discard modern habits of mind. If we impose our categories on mediæval thought we run every risk of error, and for that reason we borrow our method of exposition from the Middle Age itself. The four books of Vincent of Beauvais's *Mirror* furnish us with the framework for the four divisions of our study of thirteenth century art.

If Aquinas was the most powerful thinker of the Middle Ages,