

Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres
Henry Adams, 1905

[Mont Saint-Michel: The Tower of the Great Soldier Angel]

The Archangel loved heights. Standing on the summit of the tower that crowned his church, wings upspread, sword uplifted, the devil crawling beneath, and the cock, symbol of eternal vigilance, perched on his mailed foot, Saint Michael held a place of his own in heaven and on earth which seems, in the eleventh century, to leave hardly room for the Virgin of the Crypt at Chartres, still less for the Beau Christ of the thirteenth century at Amiens. The Archangel stands for Church and State, and both militant. He is the conqueror of Satan, the mightiest of all created spirits, the nearest to God. His place was where the danger was greatest; therefore you find him here. For the same reason he was, while the pagan danger lasted, the patron saint of France. So the Normans, when they were converted to Christianity, put themselves under his powerful protection. So he stood for centuries on his Mount in Peril of the Sea, watching across the tremor of the immense ocean—*immensi tremor oceani*—as Louis XI, inspired for once to poetry, inscribed on the collar of the Order of Saint Michael which he created. So soldiers, nobles, and monarchs went on pilgrimage to his shrine; so the common people followed, and still follow, like ourselves.

The church stands high on the summit of this granite rock, and on its west front is the platform, to which the tourist ought first to climb. From the edge of this platform, the eye plunges down, two hundred and thirty-five feet, to the wide sands or the wider ocean, as the tides recede or advance, under an infinite sky, over a restless sea...



...From the top of this Abbey Church one looks across the bay to Avranches, and towards Coutances and the Cotentin—the *Constantinus pagus*—whose shore, facing us, recalls the coast of New England. The relation between the granite of one coast and that of the other may be fanciful, but the relation between the people who live on each is as hard and practical a fact as the granite itself. When one enters the church, one notes first the four great triumphal piers or columns, at the intersection of the nave and transepts,

and on looking into M. Corroyer's architectural study which is the chief source of all one's acquaintance with the Mount, one learns that these piers were constructed in 1058. Four out of five American tourists will instantly recall the only date of mediaeval history they ever knew, the date of the Norman Conquest. Eight years after these piers were built, in 1066, Duke William of Normandy raised an army of forty thousand men in these parts, and in northern France, whom he took to England, where they mostly stayed. For a hundred and fifty years, until 1204, Normandy and England were united; the Norman peasant went freely to England with his lord, spiritual or temporal; the Norman woman, a very capable person, followed her husband or her parents; Normans held nearly all the English fiefs; filled the English Church; crowded the English Court; created the English law; and we know that French was still currently spoken in England as late as 1400, or thereabouts... Since the generation which followed William to England in 1066, we can reckon twenty-eight or thirty from father to son, and, if you care to figure up the sum, you will find that you had about two hundred and fifty million arithmetical ancestors living in the middle of the eleventh century. The whole population of England and northern France may then have numbered five million, but if it were fifty it would not much affect the certainty that, if you have any English blood at all, you have also Norman. If we could go back and live again in all our two hundred and fifty million arithmetical ancestors of the eleventh century, we should find ourselves doing many surprising things, but among the rest we should pretty certainly be ploughing most of the fields of the Cotentin and Calvados; going to mass in every parish church in Normandy; rendering military service to every lord, spiritual or temporal, in all this region; and helping to build the Abbey Church at Mont-Saint-Michel. From the roof of the Cathedral of Coutances over yonder, one may look away over the hills and woods, the farms and fields of Normandy, and so familiar, so homelike are they, one can almost take oath that in this, or the other, or in all, one knew life once and has never so fully known it since.

Never so fully known it since! For we of the eleventh century, hard-headed, close-fisted, grasping, shrewd, as we were, and as Normans are still said to be, stood more fully in the centre of the world's movement than our English descendants ever did. We were a part, and a great part, of the Church, of France, and of Europe. The Leos and Gregories of the tenth and eleventh centuries leaned on us in their great struggle for reform. Our Duke Richard-Sans-Peur, in 966, turned the old canons out of the Mount in order to bring here the highest influence of the time, the Benedictine monks of Monte Cassino. Richard II, grandfather of William the Conqueror, began this Abbey Church in 1020, and helped Abbot Hildebert to build it. When William the Conqueror in 1066 set out to conquer England, Pope Alexander II stood behind him and blessed his banner. From that moment our Norman Dukes cast the Kings of France into the shade. Our activity was not limited to northern Europe, or even confined by Anjou and Gascony. When we stop at Coutances, we will drive out to Hauteville to see where Tancred came from, whose sons Robert [Guiscard] and Roger were conquering Naples and Sicily at the time when the Abbey Church was building on the Mount. Normans were everywhere in 1066, and everywhere in the lead of their age. We were a serious race. If you want other proof of it, besides our record in war and in politics, you have only to look at our art. Religious art is the measure of human depth and sincerity; any triviality, any weakness, cries aloud. If this church on the Mount is not proof enough of Norman character, we will stop at Coutances for a wider view. Then we will go to Caen and Bayeux. From there, it would

almost be worth our while to leap at once to Palermo. It was in the year 1131 or thereabouts that Roger began the Cathedral at Cefalu and the Chapel Royal at Palermo; it was about the year 1174 that his grandson William began the Cathedral of Monreale. No art—either Greek or Byzantine, Italian or Arab—has ever created two religious types so beautiful, so serious, so impressive, and yet so different, as Mont-Saint-Michel watching over its northern ocean, and Monreale, looking down over its forests of orange and lemon, on Palermo and the Sicilian seas.

Down nearly to the end of the twelfth century the Norman was fairly master of the world in architecture as in arms, although the thirteenth century belonged to France, and we must look for its glories on the Seine and Marne and Loire; but for the present we are in the eleventh century—tenants of the Duke or of the Church or of small feudal lords who take their names from the neighbourhood—Beaumont, Carteret, Greville, Percy, Pierpont—who, at the Duke's bidding, will each call out his tenants, perhaps ten men-at-arms with their attendants, to fight in Brittany, or in the Vexin toward Paris, or on the great campaign for the conquest of England which is to come within ten years—the greatest military effort that has been made in western Europe since Charlemagne and Roland were defeated at Roncesvalles three hundred years ago. For the moment, we are helping to quarry granite for the Abbey Church, and to haul it to the Mount, or load it on our boat. We never fail to make our annual pilgrimage to the Mount on the Archangel's Day, October 16. We expect to be called out for a new campaign which Duke William threatens against Brittany, and we hear stories that Harold the Saxon, the powerful Earl of Wessex in England, is a guest, or, as some say, a prisoner or a hostage, at the Duke's Court, and will go with us on the campaign. The year is 1058.

All this time we have been standing on the parvis, looking out over the sea and sands which are as good eleventh-century landscape as they ever were; or turning at times towards the church door which is the *pons seclorum*, the bridge of ages, between us and our ancestors. Now that we have made an attempt, such as it is, to get our minds into a condition to cross the bridge without breaking down in the effort, we enter the church and stand face to face with eleventh-century architecture; a ground-plan which dates from 1020; a central tower, or its piers, dating from 1058; and a church completed in 1135. France can offer few buildings of this importance equally old, with dates so exact. Perhaps the closest parallel to Mont-Saint-Michel is Saint-Benoit-sur-Loire, above Orleans, which seems to have been a shrine almost as popular as the Mount, at the same time. Chartres was also a famous shrine, but of the Virgin, and the west porch of Chartres, which is to be our peculiar pilgrimage, was a hundred years later than the ground-plan of Mont-Saint-Michel, although Chartres porch is the usual starting-point of northern French art. Queen Matilda's Abbaye-aux-Dames, now the Church of the Trinity, at Caen, dates from 1066. Saint Sernin at Toulouse, the porch of the Abbey Church at Moissac, Notre-Dame-du-Port at Clermont, the Abbey Church at Vezelay, are all said to be twelfth-century. Even San Marco at Venice was new in 1020.

...[T]he overmastering strength of the eleventh century is stamped on a great scale here, not only in the four spans of the nave, and in the transepts, but chiefly in the triumphal columns of the croisee. No one is likely to forget what Norman architecture was, who takes the trouble to pass once through this fragment of its earliest bloom. The dimensions are not great, though greater than safe construction warranted. Abbot Hildebert's whole church did not exceed two hundred and thirty feet in length in the

interior, and the span of the triumphal arch was only about twenty-three feet, if the books can be trusted. The nave of the Abbaye-aux-Dames appears to have about the same width, and probably neither of them was meant to be vaulted. The roof was of timber, and about sixty-three feet high at its apex. Compared with the great churches of the thirteenth century, this building is modest, but its size is not what matters to us. Its style is the starting-point of all our future travels...

In the year 1203, Philip Augustus expelled the English from Normandy and conquered the province; but, in the course of the war the Duke of Brittany, who was naturally a party to any war that took place under his eyes, happened to burn the town beneath the Abbey, and in doing so, set fire unintentionally to the Abbey itself. The sacrilege shocked Philip Augustus, and the wish to conciliate so powerful a vassal as Saint Michel, or his abbot, led the King of France to give a large sum of money for repairing the buildings. The Abbot Jordan (1191-1212) at once undertook to outdo all his predecessors, and, with an immense ambition, planned the huge pile which covers the whole north face of the Mount, and which has always borne the expressive name of the Merveille [Fr. "marvel", or "wonder"].

The general motive of abbatial building was common to them all. Abbeys were large households. The church was the centre, and at Mont-Saint-Michel the summit, for the situation compelled the abbots there to pile one building on another instead of arranging them on a level in squares or parallelograms. The dormitory in any case had to be near a door of the church, because the Rule required constant services, day and night. The cloister was also hard-by the church door, and, at the Mount, had to be on the same level in order to be in open air. Naturally the refectory must be immediately beneath one or the other of these two principal structures, and the hall, or place of meeting for business with the outside world, or for internal administration, or for guests of importance, must be next the refectory. The kitchen and offices would be placed on the lowest stage, if for no other reason, because the magazines were two hundred feet below at the landing-place, and all supplies, including water, had to be hauled up an inclined plane by windlass. To administer such a society required the most efficient management. An abbot on this scale was a very great man, indeed, who enjoyed an establishment of his own, close by, with officers in no small number; for the monks alone numbered sixty, and even these were not enough for the regular church services at seasons of pilgrimage. The Abbot was obliged to entertain scores and hundreds of guests, and these, too, of the highest importance, with large suites. Every ounce of food must be brought from the mainland, or fished from the sea. All the tenants and their farms, their rents and contributions, must be looked after. No secular prince had a more serious task of administration, and none did it so well...

Once the scale was fixed, the arrangement was easy. Beginning at the lowest possible level, one plain, very solidly built, vaulted room served as foundation for another, loftier and more delicately vaulted; and this again bore another which stood on the level of the church, and opened directly into the north transept. This arrangement was then doubled; and the second set of rooms, at the west end, contained the cellar on the lower level, another great room or hall above it, and the cloister at the church door, also entering into the north transept. Doorways, passages, and stairs unite them all. The two heavy halls on the lowest level are now called the almonry and the cellar, which is a distinction between administrative arrangements that does not concern us.

Architecturally the rooms might, to our untrained eyes, be of the same age with the Aquilon. They are earliest Transition, as far as a tourist can see, or at least they belong to the class of crypts which has an architecture of its own. The rooms that concern us are those immediately above: the so-called Salle des Chevaliers ["Hall of the Knights] at the west end; and the so-called refectory at the east. Every writer gives these rooms different names, and assigns them different purposes, but whatever they were meant for, they are, as halls, the finest in France; the purest in thirteenth-century perfection.

The Salle des Chevaliers of the Order of Saint Michael created by Louis XI in 1469 was, or shall be for tourist purposes, the great hall that every palace and castle contained, and in which the life of the chateau centred. Planned at about the same time with the Cathedral of Chartres (1195-1210), and before the Abbey Church of Saint-Denis, this hall and its neighbour the refectory, studied together with the cathedral and the abbey, are an exceedingly liberal education for anybody, tourist or engineer or architect... The masculine, military energy of Saint Michael lives still in every stone. The genius that realized this warlike emotion has stamped his power everywhere, on every centimetre of his work; in every ray of light; on the mass of every shadow; wherever the eye falls; still more strongly on all that the eye divines, and in the shadows that are felt like the lights. The architect intended it all. Any one who doubts has only to step through the doorway in the corner into the refectory. There the architect has undertaken to express the thirteenth-century idea of the Archangel; he has left the twelfth century behind him.

The refectory, which has already served for a measure of the Abbot's scale, is, in feeling, as different as possible from the hall. Six charming columns run down the centre, dividing the room into two vaulted aisles, apparently about twenty-seven feet in height. Wherever the hall was heavy and serious, the refectory was made light and graceful. Hardly a trace of the Romanesque remains. Only the slight, round columns are not yet grooved or fluted, and their round capitals are still slightly severe. Every detail is lightened. The great fireplaces are removed to each end of the room. The most interesting change is in the windows. When you reach Chartres, the great book of architecture will open on the word "Fenestration,"—Fenestre [pertaining to sources of natural light, specifically windows and their placement]—a word as ugly as the thing was beautiful; and then, with pain and sorrow, you will have to toil till you see how the architects of 1200 subordinated every other problem to that of lighting their spaces. Without feeling their lights, you can never feel their shadows. These two halls at Mont-Saint-Michel are antechambers to the nave of Chartres; their fenestration, inside and out, controls the whole design. The lighting of the refectory is superb, but one feels its value in art only when it is taken in relation to the lighting of the hall, and both serve as a simple preamble to the romance of the Chartres windows...

The two halls remain almost the only monuments of what must be called secular architecture of the early and perfect period of Gothic art (1200-10). Churches enough remain, with Chartres at their head, but all the great abbeys, palaces and chateaux of that day are ruins. Arques, Gaillard, Montargis, Coucy, the old Louvre, Chinon, Angers, as well as Cluny, Clairvaux, Citeaux, Jumieges, Vezelay, Saint-Denis, Poissy, Fontevrault, and a score of other residences, royal or semi-royal, have disappeared wholly, or have lost their residential buildings... [Many of the aforementioned abbeys fell into ruin as a result of the French Revolution. The remnants that were, centuries later, salvaged are to

be found at the Musée National du Moyen Age, Paris and, more importantly, the Cloisters Museum, New York.]

If any lingering doubt remains in regard to the professional cleverness of the architect and the thoroughness of his study, we had best return to the great hall, and pass through a low door in its extreme outer angle, up a few steps into a little room some thirteen feet square, beautifully vaulted, lighted, warmed by a large stone fireplace, and in the corner, a spiral staircase leading up to another square room above opening directly into the cloister. It is a little library or charter-house. The arrangement is almost too clever for gravity, as is the case with more than one arrangement in the Merveille. From the outside one can see that at this corner the architect had to provide a heavy buttress against a double strain, and he built up from the rock below a square corner tower as support, into which he worked a spiral staircase leading from the cellar up to the cloisters. Just above the level of the great hall he managed to construct this little room, a gem. The place was near and far; it was quiet and central...A few steps upward brought them to the cloisters for meditation; a few more brought them to the church for prayer. A few steps downward brought them to the great hall, for business, a few steps more led them into the refectory, for dinner. To contemplate the goodness of God was a simple joy when one had such a room to work in; such a spot as the great hall to walk in, when the storms blew; or the cloisters in which to meditate, when the sun shone; such a dining-room as the refectory; and such a view from one's windows over the infinite ocean...

[Subsequent additions] still kept the grand style; it expressed the unity of Church and State, God and Man, Peace and War, Life and Death, Good and Bad; it solved the whole problem of the universe. The priest and the soldier were both at home here, in 1215 as in 1115 or in 1058; the politician was not outside of it; the sinner was welcome; the poet was made happy in his own spirit, with a sympathy, almost an affection, that suggests a habit of verse in the Abbot as well as in the architect. God reconciles all. The world is an evident, obvious, sacred harmony...

One looks back on it all as a picture; a symbol of unity; an assertion of God and Man in a bolder, stronger, closer union than ever was expressed by other art; and when the idea is absorbed, accepted, and perhaps partially understood, one may move on...

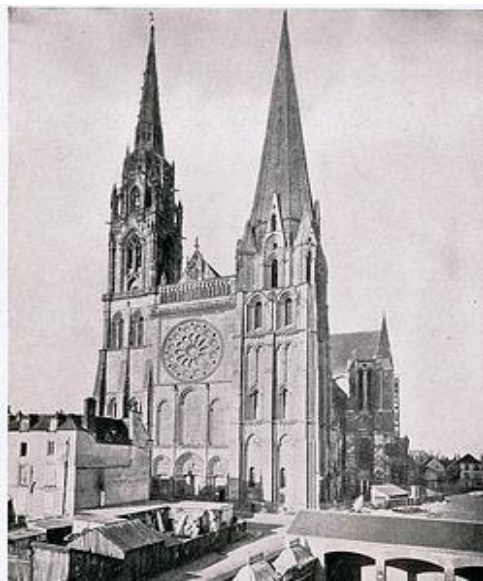
[Chartres: The Castle of the Queen of Heaven and Earth]

For a first visit to Chartres, choose some pleasant morning when the lights are soft, for one wants to be welcome, and the cathedral has moods, at times severe. At best, the Beauce is a country none too gay.

The first glimpse that is caught, and the first that was meant to be caught, is that of the two spires. With all the education that Normandy and the *Ile de France* can give, one is still ignorant. The spire is the simplest part of the Romanesque or Gothic architecture, and needs least study in order to be felt. It is a bit of sentiment almost pure of practical purpose. It tells the whole of its story at a glance, and its story is the best that architecture had to tell, for it typified the aspirations of man at the moment when man's aspirations were highest. Yet nine persons out of ten—perhaps ninety-nine in a hundred—who come within sight of the two spires of Chartres will think it a jest if they are told that the smaller of the two, the simpler, the one that impresses them least, is the one which they are expected to recognize as the most perfect piece of architecture in the world. Perhaps the French critics might deny that they make any such absolute claim; in that case you

can ask them what their exact claim is; it will always be high enough to astonish the tourist.

Astonished or not, we have got to take this southern spire of the Chartres Cathedral as the object of serious study, and before taking it as art, must take it as history. The foundations of this tower—always to be known as the "old tower"—are supposed to have been laid in 1091, before the first crusade. The fleche was probably half a century later (1145-70). The foundations of the new tower, opposite, were laid not before 1110, when also the portal which stands between them, was begun with the three lancet windows above it, but not the rose. For convenience, this old facade—including the portal and the two towers, but not the fleches, and the three lancet windows, but not the rose—may be dated as complete about 1150.



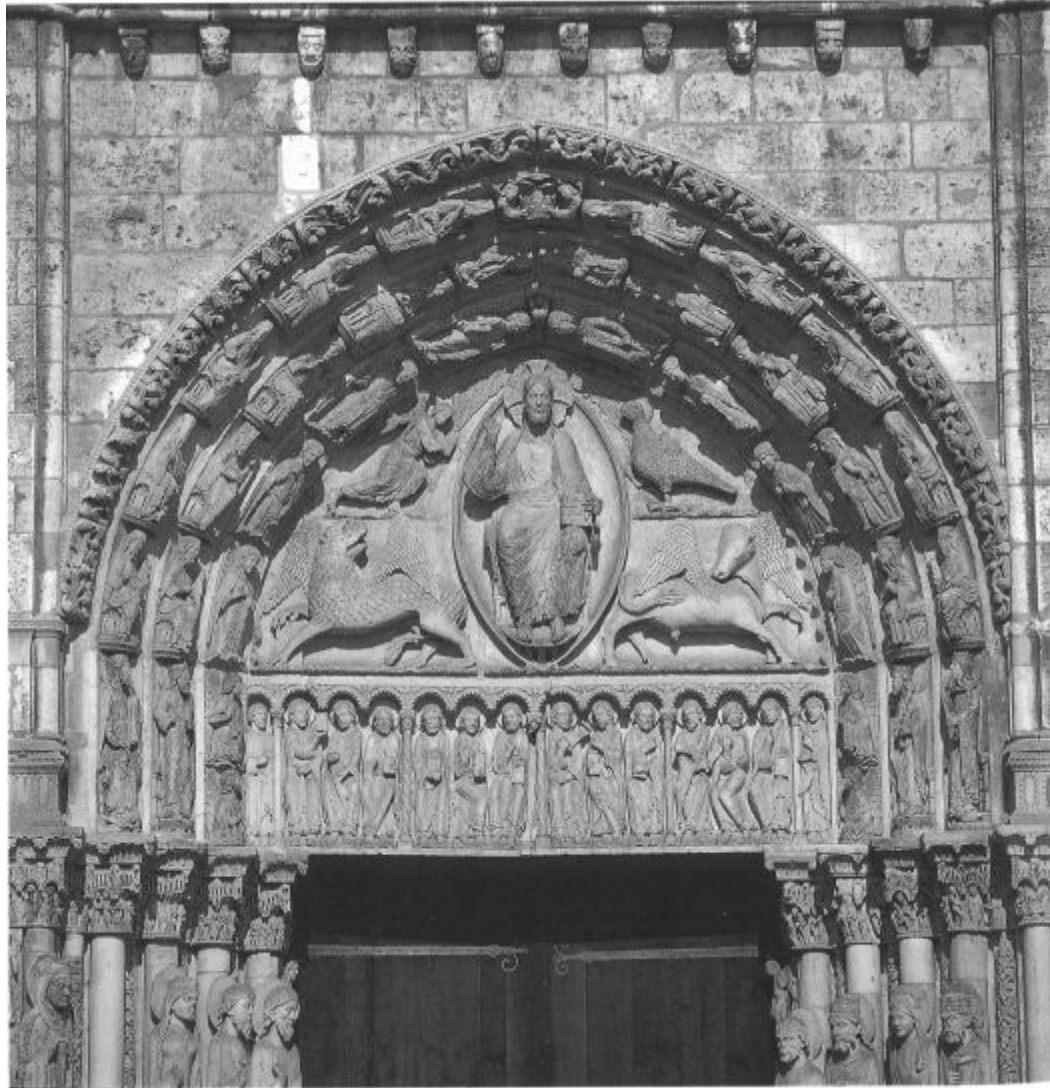
Originally the whole portal—the three doors and the three lancets—stood nearly forty feet back, on the line of the interior foundation, or rear wall of the towers. This arrangement threw the towers forward, free on three sides, as at Poitiers, and gave room for a parvis, before the portal—a porch, roofed over, to protect the pilgrims who always stopped there to pray before entering the church. When the church was rebuilt after the great fire of 1194, and the architect was required to enlarge the interior, the old portal and lancets were moved bodily forward, to be flush with the front walls of the two towers, as you see the facade to-day; and the facade itself was heightened, to give room for the rose, and to cover the loftier pignon and vaulting behind. Finally, the wooden roof, above the stone vault, was masked by the Arcade of Kings and its railing, completed in the taste of Philip [III], who reigned from 1270 to 1285.

You will see portals and porches more or less of the same period elsewhere in many different places—at Paris, Le Mans, Sens, Autun, Vezelay, Clermont-Ferrand, Moissac, Arles—a score of them; for the same piety has protected them more than once; but you will see no other so complete or so instructive, and you may search far before you will find another equally good in workmanship. Study of the Chartres portal covers all the

rest. The feeling and motive of all are nearly the same, or vary only to suit the character of the patron saint; and the point of all is that this feeling is the architectural child of the first crusade. At Chartres one can read the first crusade in the portal, as at Mont-Saint-Michel in the Aquilon and the promenoir.

The Abbe Bulteau gives reason for assuming the year 1117 as the approximate date of the sculpture about the west portal, and you saw at Mont-Saint-Michel, in the promenoir of Abbot Roger II, an accurately dated work of the same decade; but whatever the date of the plan, the actual work and its spirit belong to 1145 or thereabouts. Some fifty years had passed since the crusaders streamed through Constantinople to Antioch and Jerusalem, and they were daily going and returning. You can see the ideas they brought back with the relics and missals and enamels they bought in Byzantium. Over the central door is the Christ, which might be sculptured after a Byzantine enamel, with its long nimbus or aureole or glory enclosing the whole figure. Over the left door is an Ascension, bearing the same stamp; and over the right door, the seated Virgin, with her crown and her two attendant archangels, is an empress. Here is the Church, the Way, and the Life of the twelfth century that we have undertaken to feel, if not to understand!

First comes the central doorway, and above it is the glory of Christ, as the church at Chartres understood Christ in the year 1150; for the glories of Christ were many, and the Chartres Christ is one. Whatever Christ may have been in other churches, here, on this portal, he offers himself to his flock as the herald of salvation alone. Among all the imagery of these three doorways, there is no hint of fear, punishment, or damnation, and this is the note of the whole time. Before 1200, the Church seems not to have felt the need of appealing habitually to terror; the promise of hope and happiness was enough; even the portal at Autun, which displays a Last Judgment, belonged to Saint Lazarus the proof and symbol of resurrection. A hundred years later, every church portal showed Christ not as Saviour but as Judge, and He presided over a Last Judgment at Bourges and Amiens, and here on the south portal, where the despair of the damned is the evident joy of the artist, if it is not even sometimes a little his jest, which is worse. At Chartres Christ is identified with His Mother, the spirit of love and grace, and His Church is the Church Triumphant.



Not only is fear absent; there is not even a suggestion of pain; there is not a martyr with the symbol of his martyrdom; and what is still more striking, in the sculptured life of Christ, from the Nativity to the Ascension, which adorns the capitals of the columns, the single scene that has been omitted is the Crucifixion. There, as everywhere in this portal, the artists seem actually to have gone out of their way in order to avoid a suggestion of suffering. They have pictured Christ and His Mother in all the other events of their lives; they have represented evangelists; apostles; the twenty-four old men of the Apocalypse; saints, prophets, kings, queens, and princes, by the score; the signs of the zodiac, and even the seven liberal arts: grammar, rhetoric, dialectics, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music; everything is there except misery.

Perhaps Our Lady of Chartres was known to be peculiarly gracious and gentle, and this may partially account also for the extreme popularity of her shrine; but whatever the reason, her church was clearly intended to show only this side of her nature, and to

impress it on her Son. You can see it in the grave and gracious face and attitude of the Christ, raising His hand to bless you as you enter His kingdom; in the array of long figures which line the entrance to greet you as you pass; in the expression of majesty and mercy of the Virgin herself on her throne above the southern doorway; never once are you regarded as a possible rebel, or traitor, or a stranger to be treated with suspicion, or as a child to be impressed by fear...

Look at the central window! Naturally, there sits the Virgin, with her genealogical tree on her left, and her Son's testimony on her right to prove her double divinity. She is seated in the long halo; as, on the western portal, directly beneath her, her Son is represented in stone. Her crown and head, as well as that of the Child, are fourteenth-century restorations more or less like the original; but her cushioned throne and her robes of imperial state, as well as the flowered sceptre in either hand, are as old as the sculpture of the portal, and redolent of the first crusade. On either side of her, the Sun and the Moon offer praise; her two Archangels, Michael and Gabriel, with resplendent wings, offer not incense as in later times, but the two sceptres of spiritual and temporal power; while the Child in her lap repeats His Mother's action and even her features and expression...

[The close of the Gothic Age in France and the reign of the Virgin]

A trait peculiar to this epoch is the close resemblance between the manners of men and women. The rule that such and such feelings or acts are permitted to one sex and forbidden to the other was not fairly settled. Men had the right to dissolve in tears, and women that of talking without prudery...If we look at their intellectual level, the women appear distinctly superior. They are more serious; more subtle. With them we do not seem dealing with the rude state of civilization that their husbands belong to...As a rule, the women seem to have the habit of weighing their acts; of not yielding to momentary impressions. While the sense of Christianity is more developed in them than in their husbands, on the other hand they show more perfidy and art in crime...One might doubtless prove by a series of examples that the maternal influence when it predominated in the education of a son gave him a marked superiority over his contemporaries. Richard [I], the Lion-Hearted, the crowned poet, artist, the king [and crusader] whose noble manners and refined mind in spite of his cruelty exercised so strong an impression on his age, was formed by that brilliant Eleanor of Guienne [Eleanor of Aquitaine] who, in her struggle with her husband, retained her sons as much as possible within her sphere of influence in order to make party chiefs of them. Our great Saint Louis [IX, a crusader as well], as all know, was brought up exclusively by Blanche of Castille; and Joinville, the charming writer so worthy of Saint Louis's friendship, and apparently so superior to his surroundings, was also the pupil of a widowed and regent mother.

The superiority of the woman was not a fancy, but a fact. Man's business was to fight or hunt or feast or make love. The man was also the travelling partner in commerce, commonly absent from home for months together, while the woman carried on the business. The woman ruled the household and the workshop; cared for the economy; supplied the intelligence, and dictated the taste. Her ascendancy was secured by her alliance with the Church, into which she sent her most intelligent children; and a priest or clerk, for the most part, counted socially as a woman. Both physically and mentally the

woman was robust, as the men often complained, and she did not greatly resent being treated as a man...The greatest men illustrate it best, as one might show almost at hazard. The greatest men of the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries were William [II] the Norman; his great grandson Henry II Plantagenet; Saint Louis [IX] of France; and, if a fourth be needed, Richard [I] the Lion-Hearted. Notoriously all these men had as much difficulty as Louis XIV himself with the women of their family. Tradition exaggerates everything it touches, but shows, at the same time, what is passing in the minds of the society which tradites. In Normandy, the people of Caen have kept a tradition, told elsewhere in other forms, that one day, Duke William—the Conqueror—exasperated by having his [illegitimate children] constantly thrown in his face by the Duchess Matilda [of Flanders], dragged her by the hair, tied to his horse's tail, as far as the suburb of Vaucelles; and this legend accounts for the splendour of the Abbaye-aux-Dames, because William, the common people believed, afterwards regretted the impropriety, and atoned for it by giving her money to build the abbey. The story betrays the man's weakness*...If William was the strongest man in the eleventh century, his great-grandson, Henry II of England, was the strongest man of the twelfth; but the history of the time resounds with the noise of his battles with Queen Eleanor whom he, at last, held in prison for fourteen years. Prisoner as she was, she broke him down in the end. One is tempted to suspect that, had her husband and children been guided by her, and by her policy as peacemaker for the good of Guienne, most of the disasters of England and France might have been postponed for the time...

That Saint Louis, even when a grown man and king, stood in awe of his mother, Blanche of Castille, was not only notorious but seemed to be thought natural. Joinville recorded it not so much to mark the King's weakness, as the woman's strength; for his Queen, Margaret of Provence, showed the courage which the King had not. Blanche and Margaret were exceedingly jealous of each other. "One day," said Joinville, "Queen Blanche went to the Queen's (Margaret) chamber where her son (Louis IX) had gone before to comfort her, for she was in great danger of death from a bad delivery; and he hid himself behind the Queen (Margaret) to avoid being seen; but his mother perceived him, and taking him by the hand said: 'Come along! You will do no good here!' and put him out of the chamber. Queen Margaret, observing this, and that she was to be separated from her husband, cried aloud: 'Alas! will you not allow me to see my lord either living or dying?'" According to Joinville, King Louis always hid himself when, in his wife's chamber, he heard his mother coming.

The great period of Gothic architecture begins with the coming of Eleanor (1137) and ends with the passing of Blanche (1252). Eleanor's long life was full of energy and passion of which next to nothing is known; the woman was always too slippery for monks or soldiers to grasp.

Eleanor came to Paris, a Queen of fifteen years old, in 1137, bringing Poitiers and Guienne as the greatest dowry ever offered to the French Crown. She brought also the tastes and manners of the South, little in harmony with the tastes and manners of Saint Bernard whose authority at court rivalled her own. The Abbe Suger supported her, but the King leaned toward the Abbe Bernard...

Eleanor could hardly be called docile. Whatever else she loved, she certainly loved rule. She shared this passion to the full with her only great successor and rival on the English throne, Queen Elizabeth, and she happened to become Queen of France at the

moment when society was turning from worship of its military ideal, Saint Michael, to worship of its social ideal, the Virgin. According to the monk Orderic, men had begun to throw aside their old military dress and manners even before the first crusade, in the days of William Rufus (1087-1100), and to affect feminine fashions. In all ages, priests and monks have denounced the growing vices of society, with more or less reason; but there seems to have been a real outbreak of display at about the time of the first crusade, which set a deep mark on every sort of social expression, even down to the shoes of the statues on the western portal of Chartres.

A debauched fellow named Robert (said Orderic) was the first, about the time of William Rufus, who introduced the practice of filling the long points of the shoes with tow, and of turning them up like a ram's horn. Hence he got the surname of Cornard; and this absurd fashion was speedily adopted by great numbers of the nobility as a proud distinction and sign of merit. At this time effeminacy was the prevailing vice throughout the world...[Men] parted their hair from the crown of the head on each side of the forehead, and their locks grew long like women, and wore long shirts and tunics, closely tied with points...

If you are curious to follow these monkish criticisms on your ancestors' habits, you can read Orderic at your leisure; but you want only to carry in mind the fact that the generation of warriors who fought at Hastings and captured Jerusalem were regarded by themselves as effeminate, and plunged in luxury. "Their locks are curled with hot irons, and instead of wearing caps, they bind their heads with fillets. A knight seldom appears in public with his head uncovered and properly shaved according to the apostolic precept." The effeminacy of the first crusade took artistic shape in the west portal of Chartres and the glass of Saint-Denis, and led instantly to the puritan reaction of Saint Bernard, followed by the gentle asceticism of Queen Blanche and Saint Louis. Whether the pilgrimages to Jerusalem and contact with the East were the cause or only a consequence of this revolution, or whether it was all one—a result of converting the Northern pagans to peaceful habits and the consequent enrichment of northern Europe—is indifferent; the fact and the date are enough. The art is French, but the ideas may have come from anywhere, like the game of chess which the pilgrims or crusaders brought home from Syria. In the Oriental [version of chess], the King was followed step by step by a Minister whose functions were personal. The crusaders freed the piece [the minister] from control; gave it liberty to move up or down or diagonally, forwards and backwards; made it the most arbitrary and formidable champion on the board, while the King and the Knight were the most restricted in movement; and this piece they named Queen, and called the Virgin...

For a hundred and fifty years, the Virgin and Queens ruled French taste and thought so successfully that the French man has never yet quite decided whether to be more proud or ashamed of it. Life has ever since seemed a little flat to him, and art a little cheap...

* There is a conspicuous lack of evidence for the story's premise that William was an unfaithful spouse.