

Architecture and Building

Notre Dame Cathedral—Rheims

This notable cathedral which we illustrate in this issue has the three-fold distinction of being the metropolitan church of France, the place of coronation of its kings, and one of the finest specimens of Gothic architecture in the world.

The present edifice was designed by Robert de Courcy in the thirteenth century, but its foundations date back to the fourth century. In the cathedrals which have succeeded each other upon this site nearly all the kings of France have been consecrated, from the time of Clovis in the sixth century to that of Charles X. in the nineteenth. The coronation of Philip Augustus took place in 1179, and the only later sovereigns who were crowned elsewhere were Henry IV. and Napoleon. Louis Philippe was not crowned at all, and abolished the ceremony altogether.

According to the tradition, when the Archbishop St. Remy was about to baptize Clovis a dove flew down from the sky, bringing a flask of oil in its beak; and it was with this holy oil, *la sainte ampoule*, that the kings from that time forward were anointed. The baptismal font of Clovis, the first Christian king, is still preserved in the edifice. The second monarch consecrated under the present roof was St. Louis.

Richard Tomes, in his work on "The Champagne Country," says of the architectural decorations of the cathedral of Rheims as it now stands:—

"It is remarkable above all other structures of its nature. The harmony of parts and proportions in so large a structure is indeed marvellous, and is undoubtedly one of the essential causes of its effect as a work of art.

"The magnitude of the cathedral is remarked by the passing observer, not so much from the impression which it makes from its own massiveness, as from the littleness of which every object exposed to its contrast is reduced. . . . It is three times as long as the wide front of the Astor House; and three Trinity churches placed in a line one after another would not extend so far. . . . The two towers, nearly three hundred feet high which crown the front, though not completed, are models of aerial grace.

"The grand entrance of the church is universally conceded to be the finest in the world. It is composed of three lofty-arched portals, each at least a hundred feet high, and so deep and spacious that many hundred people might easily find refuge within them without entering the cathedral. These porches are crowded so full with figures and decorations, as in fact is almost every other part of the cathedral, that the building seems built of statues, flowers and ornaments."

More than four thousand figures are sculptured upon the exterior of this cathedral, and many hundreds of these, some of them of colossal size, adorn the principal portals.

In a recent article on the Cathedrals of France by Mr. Barr Ferree, occurs the following description of these wonderful doorways:—

"The interior surfaces of the high portal arches are filled with innumerable figures of the heavenly hosts, each with its own base and canopy. Strangely enough, tympanums over the doorways have no sculptured scenes; the Last Judgment, which should accompany the figures in the arches of the central doorway, was never carved. The space over all three doorways is filled with glass; an unusual arrangement in itself, but especially so in a church which, like that of Rheims, is so richly and marvelously carved. . . . The whole of Christian theology, and life, and hope might almost be said to be carved upon these doorways, and in language that needed no schooling to understand, in words that needed no preacher to utter them, in symbols that required no mystic meaning to adapt them to their place and their work."

Above the porch, in the midst of the profusion of statues, bas-reliefs, carved flowers and other architectural ornaments which extend to the very summit of the graceful towers, is a magnificent rose window, one of the very finest in the world. The rest of the cathedral, both without and within, is worthy of this magnificent front. In the words of Miss Costello: "All round the building in every direction the same magnificent aspect is presented: all is solemn, grand and rich, all is executed in the highest style of ornamental art, all is graceful, delicate, finished and elaborate, yet the whole is filled with majesty and boldness. The mind is filled with wonder at the perseverance which could devote so much time to adorning every nook and corner to such advantage; the eye is dazzled in tracing the exquisite pattern of the open galleries, the buttresses, the finials, the crochets, the canopies and *couvres*. . . . The interior is imposingly vast and grand, immensely long, of enormous width, the pillars and arches stupendous, the painted glass magnificent and the forms of the windows exquisite; their numbers extraordinary, and their colours gorgeous. A lantern of rich glass extends along the whole length of the aisles and to the choir; at the back of the choir is an outer series still finer, and the whole expanse is one rainbow of the most glorious hues. The great rose, however, eclipses all the rest by its dazzling radiance. Molten rubies, emeralds and sapphires seen glowing through the rich stonework, and when the setting sun shines full upon that window it is impossible to conceive anything so mysterious and so splendid. Beneath this splendid rose is a line of small pointed