

AUGUSTUS WELBY NORTHMORE PUGIN, *THE TRUE PRINCIPLES OF POINTED OR CHRISTIAN ARCHITECTURE* (1841), (LONDON: ACADEMY EDITIONS; NEW YORK: ST. MARTIN'S PRESS, 1973).

### Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture

The object of the present Lecture is to set forth and explain the true principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture, by the knowledge of which you may be enabled to test architectural excellence. The two great rules for design are these: 1<sup>st</sup>, that there should be no features about a building which are not necessary for convenience, construction, or propriety; 2<sup>nd</sup>, that all ornament should consist of enrichment of the essential construction of the building. The neglect of these two rules is the cause of all the bad architecture of the present time. Architectural features are continually tacked on buildings with which they have no connexion, merely for the sake of what is termed effect; and ornaments are *actually constructed*, instead of forming the decoration of *construction*, to which in good taste they should be always subservient.

In pure architecture the smallest detail should *have a meaning or serve a purpose*; and even the construction itself *should vary with the material employed*, and the designs should be adapted to the material in which they are executed.

Strange as it may appear at first sign, it is in *pointed architecture alone that these great principles have been carried out*; and I shall be able to illustrate them from the vast cathedral to the simplest erection. Moreover, the architects of the middle ages were the first who *turned the natural properties of the various materials to their full account*, and made *their mechanism a vehicle for their art*.

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I must here mention two great defects very common in modern pointed buildings, both of which arise from the great fundamental principle of decorating utility not being understood. Many architects apply the details and minor features of the pointed style to classic *masses* and arrangements; they adhere scrupulously to the regularity and symmetry of the latter, while they attempt to disguise it by the mouldings and accessories of the former. . . . *The picturesque effect of the ancient buildings results from the ingenious methods by which the old builders overcame local and constructive difficulties. . . . An architect should exhibit his skill by turning the difficulties which occur in raising an elevation from a convenient plan into so many picturesque beauties. . . to make a building inconvenient for the sake of obtaining irregularity would be scarcely less ridiculous than preparing working drawings for a new ruin. But all these inconsistencies have arisen from this great error, — the plans of buildings are designed to suit the elevation, instead of the elevation being made subservient to the plan.*

We have in the next place to consider the use of cast-iron. When viewed with reference to mechanical purposes, it must be considered as a most valuable invention, but it can but rarely be applied to ornamental purposes.

Iron is so much stronger a material than stone that it requires, of course, a much smaller substance to attain equal strength; hence, to be consistent, the mullions of cast-iron tracery must be so reduced as to look painfully thin, devoid of shadow, and out of all proportion to the openings in which they are fixed. If, to overcome these objections, the castings are made of the same dimensions as stone, a great inconsistency with respect to the material is incurred; and, what will be a much more powerful argument with most people, treble the cost of the usual material.

Moreover, all castings must be deficient of that play of light and shade consequent on bold relief and deep sinkings, so essential to produce a good effect. . . .

Cast-iron is a deception; it is seldom or never left as iron. It is disguised by paint, either as stone, wood, or marble. This is a mere trick, and the severity of Christian or Pointed Architecture is utterly opposed to all deception.

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The scale of propriety in architecture must always be regulated by purpose, and to illustrate this more fully I will divide edifices under three heads – Ecclesiastical, Collegiate, and Civil. The greatest privilege possessed by man is to be allowed, while on earth, to contribute to the glory of God: a man who builds a church draws down a blessing on himself both for this life and that of the world to come. . . It must have been an edifying sight to have overlooked some ancient city raised when religion formed a leading impulse in the mind of man, and when the honour and worship of the Author of all good was considered of greater importance than the achievement of the most lucrative commercial speculation. There stood the mother church, the great cathedral, vast in height, rising above all the towers of the parochial churches which surrounded her; next in scale and grandeur might have been discerned the abbatial and collegiate churches. . .

It is not incumbent on all men to raise vast and splendid churches; but it *is* incumbent on all men to render the buildings they raise for religious purposes *more vast and beautiful than those in which they dwell*. This is all I contend for; but this is a feeling nearly, if not altogether, extinct. Churches are now built without the least regard to tradition, to mystical reasons, or even common propriety. A room full of seats at the least possible cost is the present idea of a church; and if any ornament is indulged in, it is a mere screen to catch the eye of the passerby, which is a most contemptible deception to hide the meanness of the real building. . . . Let every man build to God according to his means, but not practice showy deceptions; better is it to do a little substantially and consistently with truth, than to produce a great but fictitious effect.

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