

**OUR FATHERS HAVE TOLD  
US. THE BIBLE  
OF AMIENS. CHAPTER  
IV. INTERPRETATIONS**

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Our Fathers Have Told Us. The Bible of Amiens. Chapter IV. Interpretations by John Ruskin

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THE BIBLE OF AMIENS

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TOLD US

THE BIBLE OF AMIENS

CHAPTER IV  
INTERPRETATIONS

*(Separate Travellers' Edition, to serve as  
Guide to the Cathedral)*

BY

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## OUR FATHERS HAVE TOLD US.

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### *THE BIBLE OF AMIENS.*

#### CHAPTER IV.

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##### INTERPRETATIONS.

1. IT is the admitted privilege of a custode who loves his cathedral to depreciate, in its comparison, all the other cathedrals of his country that resemble, and all the edifices on the globe that differ from it. But I love too many cathedrals—though I have never had the happiness of becoming the custode of even one—to permit myself the easy and faithful exercise of the privilege in question; and I must vindicate my candour, and my judgment, in the outset, by confessing that the cathedral of AMIENS has nothing to boast of in the way of towers,—that its central flèche is merely the pretty caprice of a village carpenter,—that the total structure is in dignity inferior to Chartres, in sublimity to Beauvais, in decorative splendour to Rheims, and in loveliness of figure-sculpture to Bourges. It has nothing like the artful pointing and moulding of the



arcades of Salisbury—nothing of the might of Durham;—no Dædalian inlaying like Florence, no glow of mythic fantasy like Verona. And yet, in all, and more than these, ways, outshone or overpowered, the cathedral of Amiens deserves the name given it by M. Viollet le Duc—

“The Parthenon of Gothic Architecture.”\*

2. Of Gothic, mind you; Gothic clear of Roman tradition, and of Arabian taint; Gothic pure, authoritative, unsurpassable, and unaccusable;—its proper principles of structure being once understood and admitted.

No well-educated traveller is now without some consciousness of the meaning of what is commonly and rightly called “purity of style,” in the modes of art which have been practised by civilized nations; and few are unaware of the distinctive aims and character of Gothic. The purpose of a good Gothic builder was to raise, with the native stone of the place he had to build in, an edifice as high and as spacious as he could, with calculable and visible

\* Of French Architecture, accurately, in the place quoted, “Dictionary of Architecture,” vol. i., p. 71; but in the article “Cathédrale,” it is called (vol. ii., p. 330) “l’église *ogivale* par excellence.”

security, in no protracted and wearisome time, and with no monstrous or oppressive compulsion of human labour.

He did not wish to exhaust in the pride of a single city the energies of a generation, or the resources of a kingdom; he built for Amiens with the strength and the exchequer of Amiens; with chalk from the cliffs of the Somme,\* and under the orders of two successive bishops, one of whom directed the foundations of the edifice, and the other gave thanks in it for its completion. His object, as a designer, in common with all the sacred builders of his time in the North, was to admit as much light into the building as was consistent with the comfort of it; to make its structure intelligibly

\* It was a universal principle with the French builders of the great ages to use the stones of their quarries as they lay in the bed; if the beds were thick, the stones were used of their full thickness—if thin, of their necessary thinness, adjusting them with beautiful care to directions of thrust and weight. The natural blocks were never sawn, only squared into fitting, the whole native strength and crystallization of the stone being thus kept unflawed—“*ne dédoublant jamais une pierre. Cette méthode est excellente, elle conserve à la pierre toute sa force naturelle,—tous ses moyens de résistance.*” See M. Viollet le Duc, Article “Construction” (*Matériaux*), vol. iv., p. 129. He adds the very notable fact that, *to this day, in seventy departments of France, the use of the stone-saw is unknown.*

admirable, but not curious or confusing; and to enrich and enforce the understood structure with ornament sufficient for its beauty, yet yielding to no wanton enthusiasm in expenditure, nor insolent in giddy or selfish ostentation of skill; and finally, to make the external sculpture of its walls and gates at once an alphabet and epitome of the religion, by the knowledge and inspiration of which an acceptable worship might be rendered, within those gates, to the Lord whose Fear was in His Holy Temple, and whose seat was in Heaven.

3. It is not easy for the citizen of the modern aggregate of bad building, and ill-living held in check by constables, which *we* call a town,—of which the widest streets are devoted by consent to the encouragement of vice, and the narrow ones to the concealment of misery,—not easy, I say, for the citizen of any such mean city to understand the feeling of a burgher of the Christian ages to his cathedral. For him, the quite simply and frankly-believed text, "Where two or three are gathered in my name; there am I in the midst of them," was expanded into the wider promise to many honest and industrious persons gathered in His name