

**THE SUBSTANCE OF GOTHIC: SIX
LECTURES ON THE DEVELOPMENT
OF ARCHITECTURE FROM
CHARLEMAGNE TO HENRY VIII**

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The Substance of Gothic: Six Lectures on the Development of Architecture from Charlemagne to Henry VIII by Ralph Adams Cram

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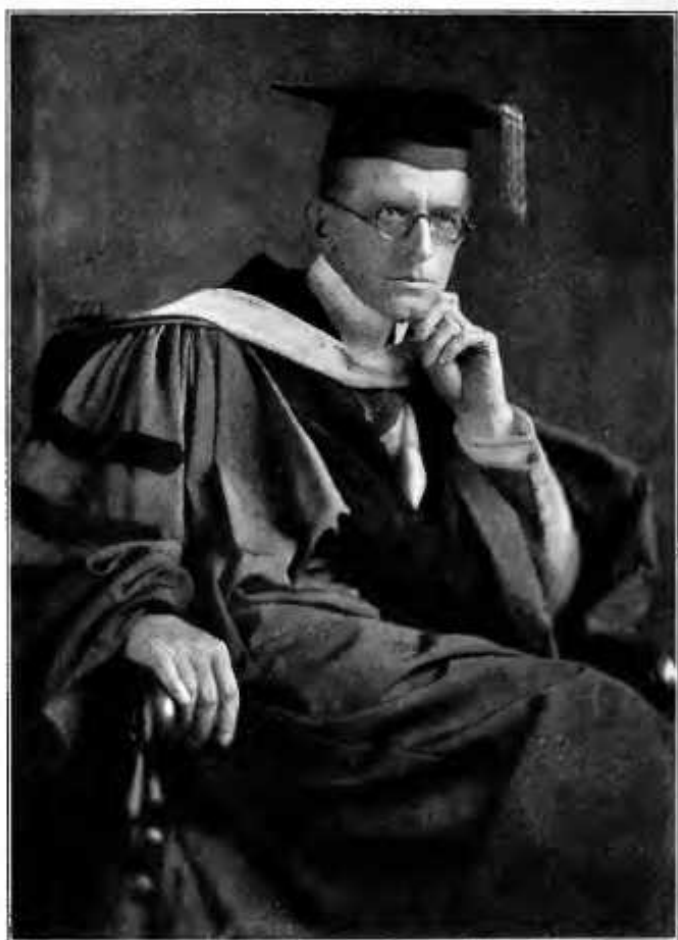
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RALPH ADAMS CRAM

**THE SUBSTANCE OF GOTHIC: SIX
LECTURES ON THE DEVELOPMENT
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CHARLEMAGNE TO HENRY VIII**



W. H. Shaw

THE SUBSTANCE OF GOTHIC

*Six Lectures on the Development
of Architecture from
Charlemagne to
Henry VIII*

GIVEN AT THE LOWELL INSTITUTE, BOSTON
IN NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER, 1916

By

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PREFACE

IN philosophical terminology every existing thing is composed of substance and accidents, the first being its essential quality, the second its visible form. Accidents may change while the substance remains immutable, and the substance may change though the accidents remain as before. Between the cradle and the grave man goes through a constant process of change, but that which makes each a definite individual, marked off from all others of his race in unique individuality, remains a fixed and immutable ego, however much it may develop and expand, or degenerate and fail. Death itself, which destroys the accidents of earthly housing, cannot touch the immortal soul or diminish its integrity, though the visible manifestation may differ as much from that of its earthly habitation as the moth differs from the chrysalis or the antecedent worm. So in the case of the Holy Sacrament of the Altar, the words of con-

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secration and the miracle that follows thereon have no effect on the accidents of form, shape, colour, ponderability, but the substance has been wholly changed, and though to the senses the wafer is still but a white disk of unleavened bread, the wine but the fermented juice of the grape, the one has become, *in substance*, the very Body of Christ, the other His sacred Blood.

For four centuries and more it has been the fashion to deny this fundamental difference between substance and accidents, to maintain that the accidents are in fact the substance itself, and perilously to confuse, in every category of thought and action, the essential "thing in itself," with the casual and transient forms of its manifestations. The war is at the same time the penalty of this folly and its drastic corrective. Whatever may be its issue, one thing is sure, and that is its operation towards breaking all things into their component parts of inner fact and outward appearance: its merciful revelation of the illusory nature of the visible forms of the commonly accepted dogmas and axioms of four centuries, and of the eternal verity of things long hidden under deceitful masks, of the eternal falsity

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of things that had come before us in appealing and ingratiating guise.

I have called these lectures, given during the winter of 1916-17 in the Lowell Institute course in Boston, "The Substance of Gothic," because in them an effort is made, though briefly and superficially, to deal with the development of Christian architecture from Charlemagne to Henry VIII, rather in relation to its substance than its accidents; to consider it as a definite and growing organism and as the exact and unescapable exponent of a system of life and thought antipodal to that of the modernism that began its final dissolution at the beginning of August A.D. 1914, rather than in the light of its accidents of form and ornament and details of structural design. Art was always the expression of the best in any people and in any time, until the last generation when, if we are to retain any belief that then there was a definite "best," we must hold that it changed its nature and became, if not the manifestation of the worst, at least that of a very low average. During the period with which I deal there is no question on this point; between the fall of Rome and the triumph of the Renaissance

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art of every kind was a visible setting forth of the highest aspirations and capacities of men, and it was even more intimately a part of personal and communal life than ever before. In every particular of ideal and of execution it follows precisely from life, and is neither to be estimated nor understood except in its relation to this life which itself must first be estimated and understood if its art is to be apprehended except after a very superficial fashion.

When, early in the last century, men began to think back into the Middle Ages, the approach was invariably made through what philosophy would call the accidents of a time and a life that had left us no more than their superficial records. The admiration that grew so rapidly was not for the substance of Mediævalism, for scholastic or sacramental philosophy, for Catholic theology, for communal organization on a human scale, it was rather for the outward forms of the several Christian arts, for the ceremonial and the devotional material of religion, for the insubstantial residuum of an ultra-mystical philosophy, for the poetry and charm and pageantry of the Mediæval decadence. It has needed this war to drive

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men back and beyond the form to the matter itself, and to give them some realization of the singular force and potency and righteousness of an epoch which begins now to show itself as the best man has ever created, and one as well that contains within itself the solution of our manifold and tragical difficulties, and is in fact the model whereon we must rebuild the fabric of a destroyed culture and civilization.

The earliest estimate, like the earliest admiration for the rediscovered Gothic art, was based on these superficial forms. For many years Gothic architecture was regarded, demonstrated and restored solely on the basis of its recorded forms, the centring of its arches, the contours of its mouldings, the nature and design of its ornament. Commentators on Gothic art produced one silly theory after another, praised inordinately its secondary qualities, and generally dealt with it after a purely empirical fashion. Amateur architects and builders copied its details (or satirized them) in wood and plaster, and the results were deplorable. "Strawberry Hill Gothic," "Carpenter's Gothic," "Churchwarden Gothic," "Victorian Gothic" (all