

of history, and the examination of antiquities excite an interest, distinct from the unquestionable advantages that accrue, and the less commendable pursuit of the mere collector. Lapse of time, and evidence of decay associate with the crumbling ruin, or the misshapen fragment, an impression of beauty, which physically they might have failed to excite, and connect the scattered dust of cities with recollections of the fall of empires, and decline of states. The early state of a nation, or the period of abasement, may be not less important in their results than the most brilliant epoch in its progress, and are equally deserving of the attention of the historian.

On the 15th of October, 1764, a traveller, sojourning at Rome, whose name has now become familiar to every Englishman as the name of potentate or general, sat musing amidst the ruins of the Capitol. The sound of vespers rose from the church of the Franciscans, once the temple of Jupiter; his mind reverted from time present to time past, and the design of writing "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" started to his mind. Years elapsed ere the plan was matured; but the work at length completed, the history of the period, from the most uncertain, became clear and distinct. To this period the attention of other investigators had turned, and it is worthy of notice, that whilst the work of Gibbon traces the history of Rome from the Antonines in the extinction of the empire in the east, and to the time of Sixtus V. in Italy, that of D'Agincourt, on the "History of Art," surveys a period commencing not quite two centuries later; and it seems likely, that as D'Agincourt and Gibbon both visited Paris during the same year, and were both on terms of friendship with Buffon, and other savans of the French capital, that the two authors were acquainted, and that the French antiquary may have gained the suggestion of his work from the Englishman, to whose history he has made reference. The period of the decline of art is taken by M. D'Agincourt to commence at the time of Constantine the Great, in the fourth century, and extends to that of Henry VII. in England, and of Julius II. in Italy, and of Albert Durer, and Leonardo da Vinci, in the sixteenth. It has of late years met with increased notice, and in Hope's "Essay on Architecture" and in the magnificent work of Mr. Gally Knight has been admirably illustrated. As the forerunner of the Gothic style it is especially interesting. The architecture of the empire, supported under Augustus by the skill of Grecian artists, declined under his successors; laborious execution and extravagant decoration were substituted for elegance of form and proportion, till beauty was crushed under a load of riches. The lives of the emperors, rendered contemptible by every degrading vice, admitted of no very healthy influence, upon architecture: it became either the outlet to extravagant ambition, or the means of blinding the populace to their enfeebled state. Ornament grew over every moulding, colossal dimensions, and difficulties of execution were sought, but not for the proper object of the art.

The time of the Antonines was one of temporary quiet, and other emperors left structures of vast extent in every portion of their dominions; but the art of architecture was gradually tending to a decline, and all powers of decoration were exhausted under Caracalla and Diocletian. Constantine destroyed the works of his predecessors to form other buildings, the principal of which were the churches of the new religion. The misfortunes which attended the fall of the empire, overwhelmed the arts in the general ruin. Many innovations were introduced, which, subsequently modified, became important features in Gothic architecture. Such were arches springing immediately from the capitals of the columns, thus used in the basilica of St. Paul, without the walls, the most considerable of the buildings of the fourth century,* and in which the old form and appellation of the basilica, or court of justice, were revived for the purposes of a Christian church. Many of the columns were taken from the mausoleum of Hadrian, and from other edifices, and are of a style of art greatly superior to the rest. At this period, columns were frequently lengthened by an additional member, and subse-

quently, in some cases, they were supported on the backs of animals; all these schemes originating in the want of ability or inclination to erect new works adapted to the purpose. In the church of St. Agnes we find three stories, exactly like the arrangement of the Gothic cathedral. The lower story has arches springing from the columns; above these is the gallery corresponding with the triforium, and used for the same purposes; and above this, the clerestory windows. The early period in the decline of art is rendered of great interest by the catacombs, in which the early Christians placed the bones of the martyrs, and in which they themselves often found refuge from persecution, and which the subsequent toleration they enjoyed contributed to render of the highest interest, and available for decoration. The catacomb had become more and more like the church, being used for the purposes of worship; and the motives of religion, which drew the early Christians to erect their churches over the graves of the martyrs, produced the arrangement of the upper and lower church or crypt, which became so usual at a later date. But the church itself was sometimes in imitation of a sepulchral chamber, as in a church at Ravenna. The church of St. Clement, at Rome, is believed to have been erected towards the close of the fifth century, or beginning of the sixth, and exhibits the disposition of the primitive churches: the plan being similar to that of basilicas. The building is terminated by an apsis, where is placed the episcopal chair. The close of the fifth century saw the Goths, under Theodoric, masters of Italy,—some change took place in the style of architecture; but Ravenna, their principal seat, contains no remains which we can call Gothic, if the pointed arch is to be considered the leading feature in that style. The mausoleum of Theodoric is a fine work of construction, but otherwise has a low rank as a work of art. The form of the vousoirs to the arches is curvilinear, and there are similar instances in England. The Ponte Salaris, three miles from Rome, was constructed by Narses, in the thirty-ninth year of Justinian's reign, A.D. 565. The principle of solidity, which has preserved this work to the present time, seems never to have been lost by the Roman architects; but its ornaments are of such a character as would disgrace any school of art. The causes of this corruption had been multiplied; the difficulty of finding artists, who had studied the principles of the fine arts had increased from day to day, till a complete ignorance was the result, and the effect was visible upon all styles of architecture. Another cause was the necessity of remodelling old forms to make them conformable to ecclesiastical rites. One of the consequences of the insufficiency of the architects was the transformation of pagan temples into Christian churches; thus the ancient temple built of brick, situated near the circus of Caracalla, underwent this change. The seat of the Greek Government at Ravenna brought the influence of the Greek taste into Italy, and the church of St. Sophia became a model frequently adopted. The church of St. Vitale, at Ravenna, was erected under the exarchate of Narses, and is remarkable for the construction of its vault, which is formed of pots arranged spirally, each one bearing on the one below it. The tribes which Narses had collected to assist him in the conquest of Italy succeeded about the middle of the sixth century in establishing themselves there. They introduced a style often bearing close resemblance to our own Norman architecture, and called the Lombard style.

"We have examined," says M. D'Agincourt, "three stages of decline: the stage first removed from the time of perfection, was characterized by a prodigality of ornament, imprinted with the Asiatic luxuriousness, which produced embarrassment and confusion. The second stage was marked by a forgetfulness and absence of the same ornaments. The third stage, of which we are speaking, is marked by the immoderate use of a multitude of accessory parts, which, far from meriting the name of ornaments, are as reprehensible for the place they occupy, as for their superabundant quality and execution. This last disorder was the general system of architecture, till the establishment in the eleventh century of that other system, to which has been given the name Gothic." The career of

Charlemagne in the eighth century was marked by a fostering care for the arts, and architecture for a moment appeared to alter its whole character; but the change was but temporary. The infusion of Greek taste at Pisa and Venice also passed away: in the latter city the cathedral of St. Mark was erected by foreign artists in imitation of that of St. Sophia. According to M. D'Agincourt, the first indication of the style which afterwards swelled into the Gothic architecture of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries occurred during the ninth century in the church at Subiaco, near Rome. But Mr. Knight, with more reason, shows there is cause to doubt whether this church is of so early a date. During the first half of this century architecture made some progress, but long before the tenth century, and during the whole of that period, its progress was completely arrested.

In the eleventh century the art was in a state of activity, for which it was indebted to Greek artists, who were employed in every part of Italy. Many of the churches in Lombardy are of this date, and they were characterized by large porches, and alternate courses of different colours. In the twelfth century, the cloisters of St. Paul, without the walls of Rome were built, in which were introduced twisted columns of every variety. In this date is also assigned by D'Agincourt, the complete adoption of the Gothic style. In the thirteenth century, Gothic architecture was the prevailing style. Mr. Knight considers there is no doubt, that the pointed arch first entered Italy in this century from the north; a singular fact, as it had previously been employed for two centuries by the Normans in Sicily. The first church which had any influence upon the style of art in Italy was that at Assisi, which is Gothic in all its parts. The fourteenth century was the period of the principal buildings of Europe, but the Italian architects never caught the true spirit of the style, or overcame the tendency to the horizontal, so inconsistent with the character of pointed architecture. It was an imitation imported by the people rather than by the artists, and there is perhaps but one building, in which it can be said to have found place in Rome. Its most striking feature is marked by the prevalence of the sister art of sculpture, in which the Italians had made greater progress. The style remained in Italy till the close of the fourteenth century, and Brunelleschi introduced a different manner in the fifteenth. The earliest works of the revival may be said to bear some resemblance to those of the decline, but greatly surpassed them. The art at once gained a new vigour: and as the Gothic of Italy had not the merits of the style in other countries, we cannot regret the change. Alberti, an architect of refined and educated taste, by his example and precepts, hastened the progress, and under Bramante, in the sixteenth century, a school of Italian architects commenced, which has existed till the present time.

The work of M. D'Agincourt is a monument of human industry. It is not confined to the art of architecture, but devotes a space, even greater, to sculpture and painting. The progress of the arts is traced, in every change of taste, from the time of Constantine to that of Michael Angelo. There are three volumes of plates, and an equal number of letter-press. The monuments of art illustrated are 1,400 in number. Several plates exhibit the gradual progress of the art, and its decline: one gives a chronological series of arches, and others show the state of architecture in the east. The Gothic architecture of Sweden, and the Arabian architecture from the eighth to the fifteenth century are illustrated. One plate is entitled "Conjectures on the origin of the pointed arch," and illustrates some curious theories. The comparative forms of detached baptisteries, of the fronts of buildings, of vaults, cupolas, and columns, and the various modes of construction, are very clearly shown, as well as the styles of Brunelleschi, Alberti, Bramante and Michael Angelo. The life of M. D'Agincourt was spent in the preparation of his great work, of which he did not live to see the publication.

Born at Besouais, April 5th, 1730, he commenced his career, under the especial protection of Louis XV., in the military profession, but left it at the instance of that king, who determined to place the brothers and nephews of

* It was erected by Theodosius, A.D. 390.