DALMATIAN ARCHITECTURE.

RICH STORES OF MEDIÆVAL ART.

DALMATIA, THE QUARNERO AND ISTRIA. With Cettigne in Montenegro and the Island of Grado. By T. G. Jackson, M. A., F. S. A., Architect. 3 vols., 8vo, pp. xxvii, 418; xiii, 397; viii., 453 Oxford: At the Clarendon Press. New-York: Macmillan & Co.

The principal subject of this beautiful work is the architecture of a region whose art and antiquities have been less studied in proportion to their interest than those of any other European country. It is true that Dalmatia, that deeply indented and island-fringed strip of the western Adriatic coast which stretches southward from the head of the sea to the principality of Montenegro, and on the west long served Christendom as a barrier against the Turk, has often been visited and described by English travellers; the ruins of the great palace of Diocletian at Spalato have been very carefully studied; the monuments of Pola, Ragusa, Trau and some other cities are not unknown; Professor Freeman has written of parts of the country in his "Subject and Neighbor Lands of Venice," and in spite of the difficulties of travel and the lack of inns and guide-books, Mr. Jackson found with dismay in Curzola the traces of an American who had purchased the splendid balconies and brackets from a ruined house to adorn a villa in New-York. The attention of previous writers, however, has been directed principally to Roman remains, and the rich stores of mediæval art have been almost wholly neglected. It is to these that Mr. Jackson has applied himself, not only visiting the principal cities, Akuilieа, Trieste, Parenzo, Pola, Zara, Arbe, Sebenico, Trau, Spalato, Ragusa, Cattaro, but penetrating to towns which students do not even know by name, and—as he justly says—exploring the region from end to end. To this laborious task he brought not only an ample professional ability and a fine natural taste, but a habit of thoroughness which we can hardly praise too highly. It is delightful to examine a work composed with so much conscience. In an elaborate introductory chapter on the history of Dalmatia the author has made great use of materials both in print and manuscript not to be found except in the country itself, and in the historical sketches of particular towns he has also availed himself of the researches of local scholars, by whom he seems to have been everywhere most cordially treated. The value of this substantial groundwork for archæological investigation is apparent when Mr. Jackson comes to inquire into the dates of Dalmatian architecture, and its relations to the art of other countries, a subject which presents both peculiar difficulties and peculiar interest. He is daunted by no obstacles in pushing his searches to the very end. He completes the outlines of an ancient building by tracing fragments of the original wall through the cellars and partitions of modern houses. He crawls out of attic windows. He burrows in storerooms. He insinuates himself into reeking alleys and teeming tenements. Grave professors half suffocate themselves with material dust by creeping with him into cupolas and roof spaces. The gentry put themselves at his disposal, and the bishops give him letters which cause the gratings of the strictest convent to fly open, the chalices and ciboriums to be taken from the treasure chests, and sacred statues to come down from their niches and be measured and drawn. He never finds it too much trouble to be complete and exact.

The habit of thoroughness is discernible in the illustrations as well as in the text. Nearly all the drawings are from Mr. Jackson's own pencil. They include a large number of wood cuts, and sixty-six tinted lithographic plates, excellent both for their clearness and their pictorial character It is only to be expected that the detail drawings of an architect should be precise and to scale; but Mr. Jackson shows his love of exactitude equally in the general views in which the picture rescue effect is attained without any sacrifice of the main purpose of elucidating the text. For this reason, as well as on account of the perspicuity and directness of the style, the work is well suited to the general reader. While special students will find in it a store of technical information, nobody who has the least taste for art and the most rudimentary knowledge of its terms can fail to appreciate it. We know of few books on architecture which the unlearned will find so entertaining, the learned so satisfying, and both classes so fresh.

That art, letters and commerce flourished on the Dalmatian seacoast while the Slavonic kingdoms of the interior remained in semi-barbarism is attributable partly to the frequent intercourse between the maritime cities and the opposite shores of Italy, but still more to the survival in Dalmatia of Roman municipalities which kept alive in the midst of a flood of barbarian colonization the traditions of civic freedom, settled law, and an ancient culture. They are called by Mr. Jackson "waifs and strays of the Roman Empire," which lasted through the middle ages and are traceable even yet in the passionate attachment of the urban population to the Italian language and to the "coltura Latina," in spite of the efforts of the Austrian Government and the Croats to give the Slavonic element a complete ascendancy Dalmatian architecture was mainly based on that of Italy, and it has been strongly affected by many outside influences. Byzantine examples were adopted early and followed late. The Hungarian conquest probably introduced traces of Gothic, for the Hungarians employed Northern artists although they were not artists themselves. The later marks of the Venetian connection are indisputable. Nor were the Dalmations indebted to other nations only for ideas. Some of the most interesting of their mediæval churches, are literally built with stolen materials. Columns, capitals, lintels, all manner of carved stone work, were taken from ancient ruins or from demolished pagan temples, and worked into the new structures with an almost childlike indifference to appearances. As a concession to the proprieties stones bearing a particularly incongruous ornament were sometimes set upside down. Even in buildings of a more legitimate construction, the quality of the workmanship is not often commensurate with the excellence of the design. Honest masonry is indeed the rule; but the tooling is generally rude, and the wood carving is more noticeable for the boldness of the lines than the nicety of the finish. Indeed when we examine the details we are more often reminded of art in its decline than of art in its infancy. And yet Dalmatian architecture, with all its borrowings from neighbors and its rough imitations, has a certain individuality and distinction which entitle it, according to Mr. Jackson, "to rank as a style by itself among the various national styles of mediæval Europe." No one at any rate can study the examples in this valuable work without recognizing that a people who erected such monuments, not in opulent and peaceful cities, but in the vexed little towns of a sterile coast, if they could not always command the deft hands of artist workmen, had at least a true feeling for art. They produced architects of high merit, and they established a style which in its best examples is marked by a spirit of nobility and independence, and even in its ordinary works is rarely commonplace.

While Mr. Jackson has not attempted to write a narrative of travel, he has given us some pleasant anecdotes of personal experience, estimates of the character of the people, and descriptions of the country. He speaks well of the population, but his account of the bare and malarious land will not tempt the desultory tourist. There is easy communication between the principal coast towns by steamers; but those who leave the main route and strike inland must hire special conveyances and be prepared for rude and uncertain accommodations. Many of the towns have no inns. Mr. Jackson, however, was accompanied by his wife, "and we agreed," says he, "that we had often fared worse nearer home." They seem to have had one of the first requisites of good travellers—the art of making the best of things. The work is admirably printed and bound and well supplied with index and tables.

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