

# THE AMERICAN ARCHITECT

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## RESTORING THE STAINED GLASS TREASURES OF RHEIMS CATHEDRAL

By ORIN E. SKINNER

THE casual visitor to Rheims senses very little of the tremendous destruction which the Cathedral of Notre Dame has suffered. As one approaches from a distance its great mass continues to rise far above the city. Here and there corners are missing, but only upon close examination does one see the extent of the calcination and realize that much that appears to be still there is utterly destroyed. Even as the visitor stands at the barrier just within the western portal and looks toward the immense wall of masonry which has been erected across the nave at the crossing, he cannot see the chaos in the choir beyond and the gaping holes above.

For more than four years the Cathedral was under almost constant bombardment. Thousands of shells were hurled into the city in one day and the Cathedral alone was struck several hundreds of times. But the ancient builders had erected a structure that

could not be destroyed even by a power greater than they could imagine.

The French are doing a wonderfully successful work in the rehabilitation of their most venerated Cathedral. Truly it is a tremendous task, and at first it was thought to be an impossible undertaking. Indeed many advocated leaving it as it was, a monument to grim war. But the structure was found to be in a dangerous condition, requiring immediate strengthening. The Bishop finally decided the question through an appeal for an adequate place of worship.

Under the able direction of the architect, Monsieur Henri Deneux, the work has been progressing for several years. It will be many more before it can be called, in any sense, completed.

One of the most difficult undertakings is that of restoring the ancient stained glass, the glorious company of kings and bishops that had looked down from the clerestory for nearly



DETAIL OF AN ANGEL HOLDING THE CROWN OF THORNS



seven hundred years, and the crowning glory of the Western Rose.

Here again the question was raised, "Can it be accomplished?"

The glass had suffered greatly in the early bombardment. During the war it was commonly thought entirely lost; but even in the time of greatest stress France did

not neglect her treasures. Soldiers were requisitioned. Under fire they removed what was left of the windows. German glasses would have detected scaffolding, so rope ladders were used. With cheesecloth pasted over broken pieces to preserve every fragment, the glass was hustled off to Paris, to be hidden in the crypt of the Pantheon. Perhaps no more famous remains have ever rested in this temple than these "glassy bones" of saints, kings and bishops of Rheims.

When the fighting came dangerously close to Paris the glass was again moved,—this time to Bordeaux, where it remained until the end of the war.

Then came the problem of what disposition should be made of these precious fragments. It was found that there was only one man adequately equipped to undertake this task, Jacques Simon, a native of Rheims. For generations his family had been taking care of the Cathedral glass. His father, Paul Simon, restored the great West Rose after the disastrous hail storm of eighteen eighty-six, an undertaking which was not completed until nineteen hundred and eight, shortly before it was again in fragments. His grandfather, Pierre, had watched over these same windows, and there were records

of Simons who had guarded the glass even in the Seventeenth Century.

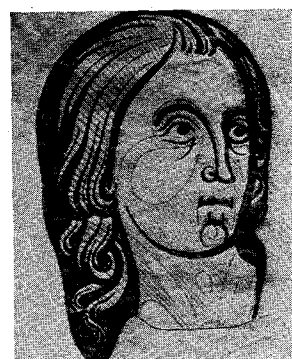
Jacques Simon is an artist with a thorough training in stained glass. Having the invaluable assistance of one of the ablest craftsmen in France, Gaston Lassabe, who had also helped Paul Simon in the earlier restoration, Monsieur

Simon's greatest good fortune, above everything, is in the possession of volume after volume of tracings and rubbings of the ancient windows, the harvest of his father's foresight.

Many years ago, Paul Simon had made hundreds of careful patterns of every detail of his loved windows. He had secured records of each section by placing a sheet of paper over it, and copying every detail. He had made color notes of each piece of glass, so that with the help of these documents trained craftsmen could skillfully replace missing pieces with a remarkable degree of accuracy. So Jacques Simon has been entrusted with the task.

Last Summer, two American craftsmen in stained glass had the good fortune of gaining permission to work in his studio. He received them with the greatest kindness, and gave them every opportunity and assistance in studying the old windows and methods of restoration, even permitting them to paint some of the new glass that was being placed in the great West Rose.

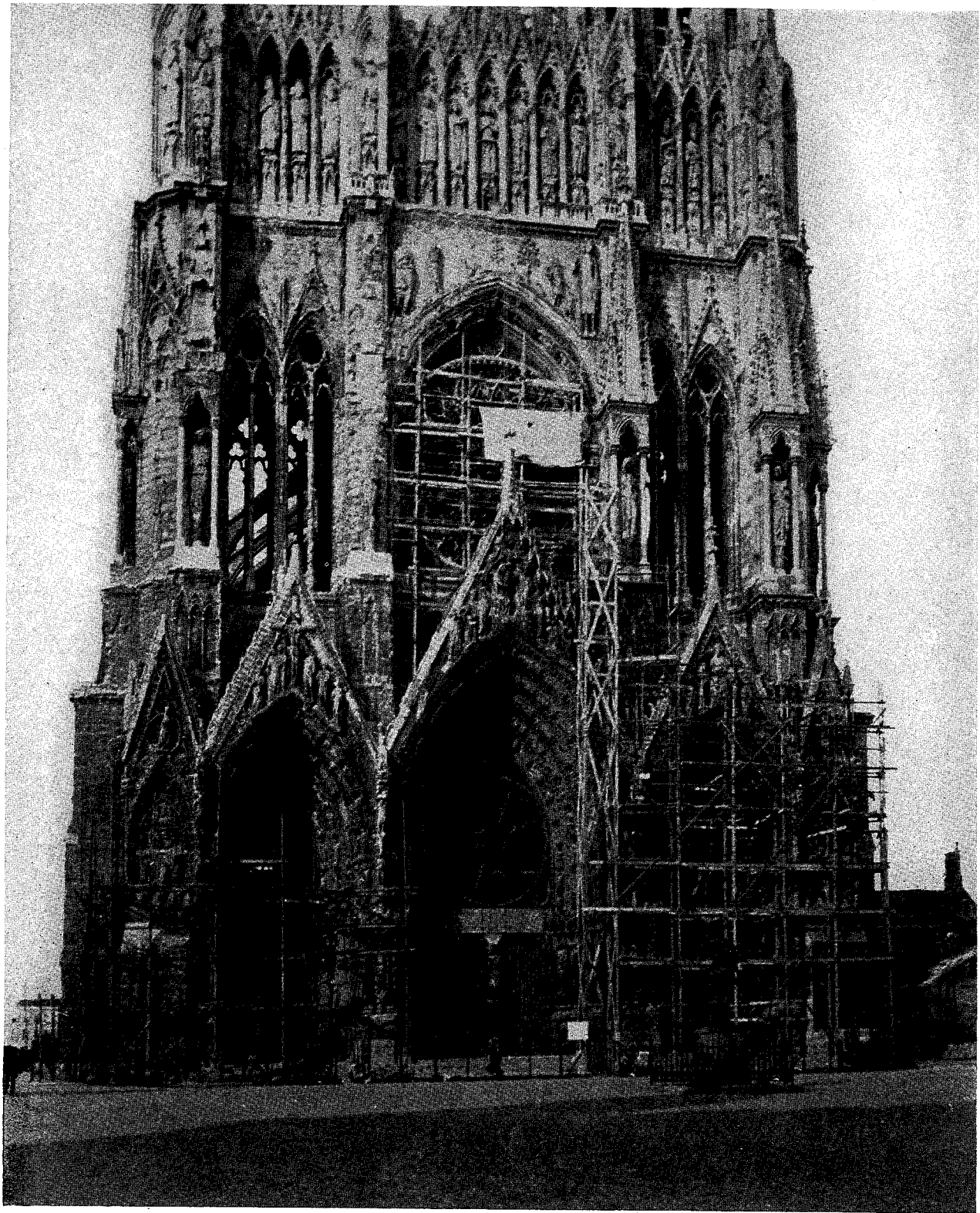
Restoration as an actual process, is being undertaken very carefully. Each section is taken individually. After a rubbing of the lead pattern is made, the glass removed from the old and weakened leads,



HEAD OF AN APOSTLE IN THE CHOIR CLERESTORY—  
THIRTEENTH CENTURY



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RHEIMS CATHEDRAL—THE SCAFFOLDING AT THE GREAT WESTERN ROSE



accumulation of surface dirt is carefully removed and the pieces of glass are laid out in their correct position on the pattern. Then glass of the required color is cut to replace the missing pieces. When this is all assembled, the new pieces are painted according to the old tracings. Every line of drapery and even every small detail of design are faithfully followed.

In much the same spirit and under conditions not so very different the windows were originally made nearly seven hundred years ago. The old craftsmen

or leaded, the window is placed in its new iron frame in the Cathedral, and now all the glory of these wonderful creations of ancient master craftsmen becomes visible. The great bold brush strokes on colored glass that seemed crude and harsh at close range are smoothed out and pulled together when placed in the lofty clerestory far above. Each color influences surrounding colors, some much more than others. The harmony of the whole is made manifest wherever one may look.



RHEIMS CATHEDRAL—CONSTRUCTION OF THE APSE

drew their designs in charcoal on table tops covered with whiting. With a hot iron they roughly cut the glass and then shaped it more carefully by slowly chipping off little pieces with a grozing iron. The glass assembled, they planed off the old drawing and were then ready for another attempt.

Today the drawing can be made on paper and the glass cut with a diamond or a sharp steel shell. But these are only the most superficial changes and, working there in the shadow of that mighty, age worn monument of the past, one could easily believe himself back in the Thirteenth Century.

After the paint is fired, and the sections glazed,

The clear pure blues begin to sing and the fine thread of silver confidently spreads its net over the entire window. Only now does one realize something of what the old craftsmen knew about their medium. How well they knew (perhaps by sad experience) the solution of every problem of halation and refraction, not in a scientific manner, but surely in a most practical and beautiful way.

Six of the nave clerestory windows are again in place; the ones nearest the transepts which were least damaged. The great western rose is almost complete and much of it has been replaced in the repaired stonework. Yet there still remains a great

number of empty windows, many of which will not be filled in one generation or perhaps two; but the work will go on.

True, this magnificent Cathedral, which has witnessed the coronation of so many French kings, can never be wholly "restored," can never be quite the



RUBBING OF SOME ACTUAL GLASS OF THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY IN RHEIMS CATHEDRAL

same. But it can and will be rebuilt and redecorated to stand again a great monument to Faith, Architecture, and Art. Although not the same, it will retain much of its original spirit of devotion and craftsmanship, to which will be added the finest of those qualities to be found in modern France—a reincarnation that will live to be the inspiration of future centuries.

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#### NO SKYSCRAPERS FOR GERMANY

RECENT despatches from Berlin announce that the German Ministry of Health has absolutely set its face against the building of skyscrapers in that city and that Berlin will continue to remain a city of five-story buildings.

The Minister of Health holds that the building of tall structures in German cities would not allow dwellers on the lower floors sufficient light, or enough air essential to health and has therefore decided against permitting a relaxation in the existing building laws.

One cannot help wishing that New York would show a similar degree of intelligence and civilization.—*Housing Betterment*.

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#### THE WORK OF DWIGHT JAMES BAUM

Published by William Helburn, Inc., New York. Price \$20.

AN elaborate volume of 192 plates, size  $12\frac{1}{2}$  x  $16\frac{1}{4}$ , of the work of Dwight James Baum has been issued. It is an unusual work. Unusual not because it for the first time presents in one volume the selected work of a successful architect, but because, having been compiled and arranged under the supervision of the architect himself, it shows the various subjects in a perfect architectural manner. Each subject selected has the usual general views and full page details, and in addition there are well poched plans and admirably well drawn full pages of measured drawings. In short, the architect has kept nothing back. He frankly shows his reader everything that is worth while knowing about the building.

Mr. Baum's work in this volume is grouped in types:—the Colonial, Formal Georgian, Italian and Dutch Colonial. Accompanying each one of these types is commentary text by Matlack Price. Mr. Price has also contributed an appreciative introduction. Interest to the work is further added by the foreword, contributed by Harvey Wiley Corbett, F.A.I.A. Mr. Corbett, now recognized as one of the most "literary" of architects, is very happy in this preface. It is worth while quoting from it. "Almost any old fiddler," writes Mr. Corbett, "can play one tune well if he plays it often enough, but it takes a *virtuoso* to play a Beethoven concerto, a Grieg sonata and a sentimental ballad by Irving Berlin all in the same evening. \* \* \* It is only the exceptional architect who has the force of will and the adventurous spirit to roam through all styles and all periods and make himself master of them all. \* \* \* This is the signal achievement of Dwight James Baum in the realm of domestic architecture." Entirely concurring with Mr. Corbett's opinion in this matter, we have borrowed his words for we can find no better of our own.

As is so completely shown in the examples selected, Mr. Baum's work is characterized by simplicity and charm. And recognizing these fine characteristics, The Architectural League in 1923 awarded him its gold medal for merit and distinction.

It will not be necessary to direct to the attention of architects the outstanding excellence of Mr. Baum's work. But, as has been set forth at the outset, it would be neglecting a duty to the readers of this journal if we failed to stress the point that in the selection of subjects, the manner of presentation and the excellent grouping, this volume is of larger suggestive value than any of this type we have seen. In fact, the architect's working library may truthfully be said to be incomplete without it.