

ably connected and definite artificial system. Nor can we doubt that it was exercised by a class of artists who formed themselves by laborious study and practice, and by communication with each other. There must have been bodies of masters and of scholars, discipline, traditions, precepts of art. How these associated artists diffused themselves over Europe, and whether history enables us to trace them in a distinct form, I shall not here discuss. But the existence of a course of instruction, and of a body of rules of practice, is proved beyond dispute by the great series of European cathedrals and churches, so nearly identical in their general arrangements, and in their particular details. The question then occurs, have these rules and this system of instruction anywhere been committed to writing? Can we, by such evidence, trace the progress of the scientific idea, of which we see the working in these buildings?

We are not to be surprised, if, during the most flourishing and vigorous period of the art of the middle ages, we find none of its precepts in books. Art has, in all ages and countries, been taught and transmitted by practice and verbal tradition, not by writing. It is only in our own times, that the thought occurs as familiar, of committing to books all that we wish to preserve and convey. And, even in our own times, most of the Arts are learned far more by practice, and by intercourse with practitioners, than by reading. Such is the case, not only with Manufactures and Handicrafts, but with the Fine Arts, with Engineering, and even yet, with that art, Building, of which we are now speaking.

We are not, therefore, to wonder, if we have no treatises on Architecture belonging to the great period of the Gothic masters;—or if it appears to have required some other incitement and some other help, besides their own possession of their practical skill, to lead them to shape into a literary form the precepts of the art which they knew so well how to exercise:—or if, when they did write on such subjects, they seem, instead of delivering their own sound practical principles, to satisfy themselves with pursuing some of the frivolous notions and speculations which were then current in the world of letters.

Such appears to be the case. The earliest treatises on Architecture come before us under the form which the commentatorial spirit of the middle ages inspired. They are Translations of Vitruvius, with Annotations. In some of these, particularly that of Cesare Cesariano, published at Como, in 1521, we see, in a very curious manner, how the habit of assuming that, in every department of literature, the ancients