

II: Baltic Provinces, December 6, 1892

The Baltic Provinces of North-West Prussia.

Crossing the Baltic from Sweden to Germany, our first sight of land, after leaving the Scandinavian coast covered ~~to~~ by green groves and showing here and there the characteristic white stepped-gable tower of a village church, is the precipitous yellow bluff of the Dornbusch, an outlying strip of land near the Island of Rügen. As the steamer proceeds Rügen itself with deep green beech forests appears on the left, whilst on the right the low coast line of the main land stretches away to the west and south. It is in this great sea-like expanse of alluvial land that we see the prevailing character of the whole of North Germany; a great plain usually as flat as the sea itself, almost destitute of stone but containing extensive beds of clay suitable for brick-making.

As we steam along this coast we catch a glimpse now and then of a red-roofed village clustered around a heavy, unorthodox looking church, between is the monotonous cultivated land with not so much as a tree to relieve the landscape unless we include the ~~straight~~ double row of low fruit trees that line a turnpike and stretch away to the horizon. Far away to the south apparently closing the round-up which we are travelling rises an irregular group of massive towers surmounted by fantastic spires, below them the steep gabled roofs of a town. They are the towers and roofs of the ancient and once famous Hansa-town of Stralsund, second only to Lübeck in power and wealth when the word "merchant" had a political as well as financial significance, and where we are to have our first experience with the characteristic and interesting Brick Architecture of the Baltic Provinces.

Lübeck, Stralsund, Rostock, Wismar and the other towns of the first Hansa league learned their business methods from the Dutch, and it was no more than natural that when

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increasing wealth and power found expression in the more pretentious architecture of a thriving city, they should also look to Holland for the materials and methods of building, and modified by their own talents cultivated by contact with the business world in the south and more especially to the east, for their artistic models as well. It is to this as well as to the natural conditions surrounding them that these northern towns were led to adopt brick as a building material and the French Gothic ground plan, or should we not more properly say the Dutch ground plan transplanted from France to the lowlands of Holland.

Brick by nature does not suggest to the builder the rich decoration usual in the same edifice constructed of stone. Clay is easy to mould but very difficult to carve when once burned, and large pieces of ornamental work are almost an impossibility as a single piece, and the execution in fragments is almost sure to lead to the repetition of motives and consequent loss of interest and variety so characteristic of the richest Gothic work. Then it must be remembered that these buildings, especially in the case of churches, were erected by a free and independent association of citizens uninfluenced and unhampered to a great extent at least by the more conservative and I add more refined priest-class that usually directed and designed the cathedrals and churches of that day.

The consequence is that we have a very free translation of the French Cathedral in the Marienkirche at Lübeck, a building characteristic of the practical minded but ostentatious German burgher of the 13th Century. The student of architecture is reminded of the great churches of north-eastern France by the cruciform plan, west towers, great height of the nave and the radiating apsidal chapels. But misses the elaborate ornament on the exterior and the slender moulded piers that support the vaulting.

In the Bathic churches the intricate flying buttress system, with its graceful curves and forest of pinnacles decorated with foliage and statuary, is replaced by simple arched supports without pinnacles or is entirely wanting; the lace-like tracery of the windows in the French examples is here represented by simple upright mullions of brick, or at most by divisions terminating in a pointed arch or simple foil treatment. The portals are never so richly sculptured, often degenerate into mere doorways and the west front ~~never~~ ^{seldom} has the dignity that would entitle it to the place of the principal facade. In the interior also we find a much simpler treatment. The piers are heavier and much more simple in section. They vary from the square through the octagon and polygon to circular and at most varied by simple round neurants to support the ribs of the vaulting. The triforium, where one exists, is usually treated as an open gallery protected by a balustrade between the vault supports, but in many of the churches the aisles are of the same height as the nave and consequently have no clerestory wall. It is in the vaulting however, where the brick construction offered no obstacle to the builder, that these churches equalled and even surpassed their models, and it is to be doubted that any country can show more elaborate vaulted construction than these north German provinces.

It is in the use of the brick ~~that~~ we naturally look for peculiarities characteristic of the style, and it is in the attempt to approach the elaborate decoration of a stone Gothic church that we find the interesting and often beautiful moulded and glazed brickwork developed in this country. Cornices, friezes, water tables, gables, tympanums over doors and windows are often richly decorated with ornament in this material, and although there is usually a lack of depth to the work and a consequent lack of shadow yet the richness and brilliancy of the colors lend an effect

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that is at once striking and satisfactory. It is in the treatment of the transept gables that the architect has been most successful in his use of this means of decoration; not only in ~~the~~ such examples as the Church of St. George at Wisimar where the soaring height of the great gable has an effect of its own without the rich surface decoration, but in the smaller buildings, as the Church of St. Catherine at Brandenburg, where the transept terminates in a series of small gables separated by pinnacles in the richest green glaze and enclosing elaborately perforated rose windows. all a mosaic of moulded brick. Not only has the artist made use of the usual Gothic motives in his work; trefoils, quatrefoils, circles, crockets, rosettes and the like, but he has often attempted more difficult work in the medallion portraits, animal figures and even in a few cases statuettes and statues in the same material brick. Indeed it is rare in these buildings to find any decoration in stone whatever, and the Gothic builder here as everywhere was always consistent in his use of the material at hand, and instead of astonishing his critics by the use of rare and costly stones brought from a distance rather invited their praise by the use of the familiar and homely clay in new and beautiful forms.

It must not be supposed that all the interest of these churches depends on their peculiar decoration or in the use of brick, for, especially in the more important examples at Stralsund and Lübeck, their dimensions alone would call for attention, and aside from the often apparently carefully studied proportions of both exterior and interior, there is a sublimity in these towering spires and soaring vaults that is not much greater in the famous cathedrals of other lands, not even at Cologne where we are simply overpowered and our criticism silenced by mere size, and multitude of details.

It was my good fortune to meet with and examine some

fifteen or eighteen churches in the pure Baltic style and I⁵ can say from my short experience that they would richly reward a careful study by someone more capable and in a position to profit by the knowledge. Even in the study of the various works on the subject, notably in the finely illustrated books of "Essenwein" "Norddeutsche Backstein" or Adler's "Mittelalterliche Backstein in Preussischen Staaten" the American architect could find much to interest him and perhaps suggest lines on which he could work with profit.

At Stralsund the Marien Kirche is perhaps the most important example in the place. Here we have a great screen on the west front rising in the centre as a square tower, changing higher up to an octagon and terminating in a cupola with lantern and spire. The square tower is flanked at each corner by octagonal turrets as is also the screen itself on the north and south sides. The screen is pierced by three great pointed windows and below is a small portal enriched by tracery and panel decorations. The plan of the church is cruciform with aisles, choir ambulatory and apsidal chapels, and in this case the aisle is continued on the sides of the transept. The nave, which is six bays in length, and the transept which extends for two bays beyond the crossing, are perhaps 100 feet in height while the aisles are one half those dimensions. The choir consists of one bay with five sides of an octagon in the apse. Beyond the ambulatory are apsidal chapels corresponding to the five sides of the apse. The vaulting of the nave, transept and aisles is simple quadripartite but at the crossing there is elaborate star vaulting springing from great piers at the four corners of the square. The vaulting of the ambulatory and apsidal chapels is continuous over both and is made up of six compartments supported on ribs springing from the choir piers and chapel walls and meeting in the centre. Here we have an example of what is a common occurrence among the brick churches. There are no external buttresses, but they are internal and

the spaces thus enclosed are utilized as mortuary chapels. The nave piers are octagonal in section with small circular recesses at the angles which carry the mouldings of the nave-aisle arches. The piers terminate in simple foliage capitals leaving a plain spandril above, for the vault ribs rest on a group of slender engaged columns which in turn rest on a corbel at the base of the triforium. The triforium is here of great height, ~~and~~ is treated with two pointed panels on the wall to each bay and below has the usual balustrade. The clerestory windows are broad and short with pointed, I might almost say triangular, heads, for the sides do not approach in a graceful curve but, as is often the case in the Baltic style, in an almost straight line making a sharp angle with the sides. These, as all the other windows, are divided by a great number of perpendicular brick mullions sometimes relieved by pointed terminations, but again running directly into the arch base of the window. The exterior decoration consists almost entirely of that peculiar pieced brick ornament characteristic of the style. This ornament is usually made up of small pieces so designed that they can be used with considerable freedom in the making up of patterns. Here the clerestory is furnished with a frieze of the three lobes of a quatrefoil in a single row; the main cornice with a double row of the same and cross-shaped perforations in the spaces between. These are common patterns not only for use in the friezes but as belt courses between the stories of the towers and at the base of gables.

The Nikolai Kirche at Stralsund shows many of the peculiarities of its style, but in this case it differs from the Marien Kirche in having two great west towers, and the west front shows a gable relieved by three sunken panels, a great central window and deeply recessed and moulded central portal. The square west towers are of great size, with almost an Italian feeling in the many stories of deeply recessed blank windows with free standing mullions and open tracery in the pointed heads. The north tower is unfinished, but the south

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is terminated by a domical roof, lantern and fantastic spire somewhat like that on the Marien Kirche. Unlike the latter church the clerestory walls are strengthened by flying buttresses simple arches of brick springing from the aisle walls. Here as in the former case the interior buttresses enclose chapels separately vaulted and cut off from the aisles by low screens. There is no transept projection in this case, but this feature is indicated by a low projection in the aisles corresponding to the buttress chapels, and the choir marked by a lofty wood screen. There is the usual octagonal apse and radiating chapels, in this case only three. Between two of these chapels is a small apartment of very irregular shape - perhaps the treasury - in which the ingenuity of the mason is displayed in a very clever piece of vaulting in which the curving axis and irregular sides of the room are closely followed.

In the Jacobi Kirche we have evidently a later structure and one which apparently is unfinished. Here also we have a square central tower ending in an octagonal top with flanking turrets at the west end, but the transept is even less plainly indicated than in the Nikolai Kirche and the choir differs from the nave only in the narrower aisles and absence of buttress chapels. There is no apse, but the choir simply ends in a square termination pierced by windows. The clerestory, which is only one third the total height, is supported by heavy octagonal piers with simple impost mouldings. There is no triforium proper, but the clerestory windows are simply carried down in blank until they meet the moulding above the crown of the nave-aisle arches.

The smaller churches of the Johannes and Heiliggeist Cloisters show no particularly new features, but are in themselves pleasing and picturesque buildings with gardens surrounded by venerable vaulted cloisters.

At Rostock I found a change not only in the ornament

which was richer and more varied, but in plan also for the Marien Kirche only shows the transept and radiating chapel arrangement. I am inclined to think, however, that this is not a real departure from the common design but rather the makeshift completion of a building that perhaps had proved too great an undertaking for the community.

The Nikolai Kirche, with aisles and nave of equal height and breadth, shows a central west tower, square to the height of the masonry and terminated by a curious, slender spire. The choir consists of two bays without aisles and a square east end. The nave-aisle piers are round in section with round remnants for the principal arches and with similar supports for the diagonal ribs of the vaulting extending down the sides of the pier for a short distance only and then terminating in a corbel. The west tower is here the dominant feature of the building. Like the Nikolai Kirche at Stralsund it is lightened by numerous tiers of windows, each tier separated from the other by belt courses of perforated glazed brick ornament which give a strong horizontal accent to the and add much to the massive effect of the tower. The Nikolai Kirche is the oldest of the churches in Rostock and as such is interesting in showing the development in the brick ornament. ~~Thus~~ For instance in the main cornice, an evidently older part, shows simple crenellations made by projecting bricks while further on the same idea is carried out in a foil corbel course in moulded brick. In the belt courses of the tower we have the latest development in not only foil corbels but foil perforations and a rich variety of glazed work.

The Petri Kirche shows a plan almost square, with nave and aisles of equal height, without a transept; to the east is a simple octagonal apse without aisles, and to the west a square tower

terminating in a homely and very tall spire (433 feet). In this building we meet with the wall decoration common in the Baltic style more especially in the secular buildings; that is the decoration of buttresses and wall surfaces by the use of courses of richly colored glazed brick alternating with courses of the ordinary quality. The colors vary from a deep brown or burnt-sienna to a most brilliant and rich green, a color that would almost compete with the glaze on Japanese pottery. The latter color is used not only for plain courses but in the ornamental work and panel decorations. The perforated belt courses and friezes are more frequently in the duller brown or even in black, and do not contrast so pleasantly with the general color of the wall.

The Marien Kirche, not far from the New Market, returns to the cruciform plan and low aisles with radiating apsidal chapels. It is of imposing appearance made so I think by the great height of the windows. The nave, transept and choir are perhaps 100 feet in height and the transept and choir windows are nearly the entire height of the building. In this church the arrangement of alternating bands of color is used extensively in the walls, and there is a variation from the usual color of the ordinary brick which here ~~is~~ yellow. The ornaments of the gable are richly moulded square blocks in green glaze set in the wall surface.

The Jacobi Kirche possesses a fine tower, strongly suggestive of the "Giralda", richly ornamented by brick laid in patterns, perforated and moulded belt courses and there is a free use of contrasted colors. These towers seldom show large openings, but the wall surface is broken and lightened by blank windows with all the tracery and ornament

of a genuine window.

At Wismar the use of glazed bas-relief ornament reaches its climax, especially in the towers and transepts of the Marien-Kirche, St. Nikolai and St. Georgen. Here we find human figures, dragons and elaborate ornament in low relief used in the friezes, belt courses, ~~and~~ at the springing of arches, and even in the archivolt itself in a few cases. The church towers show a pleasing variety and are without the fantastic copper spires of Stralsund and Rostock. That of the Nikolai Kirche ends in a simple gable roof, with the gables facing the north and south. The tympanum of the gable is decorated with a net-work of diagonal lines with circles of perforated brick-work at their intersections. This work is in ordinary brick projecting from the wall surface, but in the Marien Kirche tower, which terminates in four gables, one on each face, - the ornament is in the richest green and black glaze. St. Georgen has no towers, in fact the west front was never finished, and shows the rudest construction in the roof and upper parts as if hurriedly finished. But in the transept, of the characteristic great height, and flanked by tall, slender turrets terminating in spires, we have one of the most effective features in the entire series of buildings. Here great rose windows, belts and panels of glazed work show almost all the great variety of patterns blended into a harmonious whole, and together with the single central window of ~~two~~ ~~proportion~~ dimensions make up an architectural composition which for grandeur and effectiveness is perhaps not surpassed by any Gothic building in Germany.

In Wismar too we ^{almost} reach the climax in the height of the nave ceiling, that of St. Nikolai is 130 feet, and although mere size is no particular merit, yet these great dimensions lend ~~an~~ dignity to these interiors that would be difficult to reach, considering their simple treatment, in any other way.

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It hardly seems necessary to multiply examples of the style but an account would be very incomplete without some detailed description of the churches of Lübeck where the style took its rise, and especially of the famous Marien-Kirche of that city which is looked on as the type after which the most successful examples were patterned. The dimensions of the Marien-Kirche are befitting those of a typical example. It is 335 feet in length ~~the~~ 186 feet wide at the transept and over 160 feet in height. The great west spires which flank the gable are 407 feet in height. The west front is simply treated with pointed windows and an unimportant central portal but the great size and consistent decoration make this facade more effective than is usual in churches of the style. The west towers are square to the top of the masonry and end here in gables on each face. Above this point rise simple square spires, covered with copper, with the axis rising from the apex of the gable as is usual not only in the spires of the Baltic churches but in those of the German Romanesque buildings as well. The clerestory wall, which is unbroken by a transept, is supported by simple flying buttresses without pinnacles, and continued around the apse. The aisles, one half the height and width of the nave, broaden into a transept at the junction with the choir and then continue as an ambulatory around the apse. Beyond are radiating apsidal chapels, that in the centre larger and more important, almost arriving at the dignity of a retro-choir. The buttresses of the south side are exterior, but on the north they are interior and enclose the usual chapels. The wall decorations of the Marien Kirche are not in the usual glazed and perforated work, perhaps that was a later development, but are simple panel work in the brick walls themselves. The gables of the towers, and the

bands between the tiers of windows are simply treated with quatrefoils, trefoils and circles. The clerestory and aisle walls show no decoration and end abruptly against the projecting roof. The interior as might be expected from the dimensions is most imposing in spite of the cold bare whitewashed walls, and must have presented a rich and magnificent appearance when in its original colors. Contrary to the many examples we have already examined, the piers here are more complicated in section, and show considerable richness in the perpendicular mouldings. The triforium ^{gallery} is protected by a foil balustrade ornamented by tall pinnacles. Above rise the clerestory windows in this case of great height. In this connection it might be well to say that in almost all these churches the furniture: choir screen, stalls, benches and especially the memorial tablets are in an extravagant Renaissance, closely bordering on and in the worst period of the Rococo style which sadly injures the simple and almost severe architecture of the building.

Lübeck possesses several other churches in the Baltic style, closely resembling the Frauen Kirche in many essentials, and quite interesting in themselves; the Petrus Kirche for example, which shows double aisles, and an interesting west portal decorated with twisted columns and ornamented archivolt; the Segrider Kirche where the simple panel motives are elaborated into interlacing circles and squares; the Jacobi Kirche with a curious spire and a degenerated apse, where the east end is square and the radiating chapels are placed in a straight line.

It is hardly necessary to more than mention the cathedral at Schwerin, a building of imposing dimensions, and now completed according to the first design,

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or the Johannes Kirche at Lüneburg, with its clumsy but
purely Baltic west tower. However at Brandenburg on
the Havel and on the very boundary of the style there is an
example, in the St Catharine church, of the latest develop-
ment of the brick Gothic ornament. The transepts and
choir show the richest decoration. The transepts are most
elaborately ornamented by a series of small gables, each
enclosing a richly perforated circular ornament with
panels below. Between the gables rise small pinnacles
in green glaze. The buttresses of the nave and choir
are interesting in presenting a late Gothic feature, en-
tirely in clay, with all the elaboration of stone masonry.
Here we find the perpendicular mouldings, the crocketed
pinnacles, the canopied niches and even the statuettes
of the richest Gothic work all worked out in brick
work and burnt clay, with the addition of the brilliant
color and rich surface of the characteristic glazed work.

It must not be supposed that the churches are the
only remains of this style of architecture for all the towns
we have been mentioning contain not only numerous
towers, walls and city gates but many private houses,
which although perhaps of later date show all the pe-
culiarities of the style and an added life and variety not
suitable to the more sober design of a church. The
gates especially, closing as they always do the vista of a gabled
and turreted street, are most picturesque and pleasing.
The façade with numerous windows separated by strong
perpendicular lines; the fantastic gable or steep roof and slender
spire above and the dark low pointed arch below give
to these towns a medieval air that the churches never
do. The houses of the period usually show the gable to
the street, and it is this feature that is the most

14 richly decorated. It is generally "stepped"; in the common houses that is all, but the considerable height and the numerous windows give it a noteworthy appearance. In the more pretentious houses, each step ends in a pinnacle at its outer corner, and this pinnacle, usually octagonal, is carried down the wall in a buttress-like projection ending on the line of the moulding above the first story. The windows between these buttresses are treated singly or in groups and almost always with Gothic detail; pointed heads, tracery and moulded archivolts. The first story is usually perfectly plain or at most shows a decorated doorway.

In some of the towns, notably the Alte-Schule at Wisman and the Rathhouses at Lübeck and Brandenburg, we have these same ideas carried out on a larger and more elaborate scale in the public buildings. Glazed brick is freely used, always with effect, and the result is if anything more satisfactory than its use in the churches.

The masonry of these Baltic buildings is what a modern bricklayer would perhaps call bad; the bricks are large - 11" x 5½" x 3" - and laid in from ¾" to 1" of coarse mortar. The system of laying is in Flemish bond, and I might add here that in Germany alone - or a few examples also in Sweden - I found the "Flemish" bond. In Flanders itself everything is in the so-called English bond.

I still have a few of the Baltic cities to visit: Stettin, Stargard and Danzig, but do not expect to find very much that is new, excepting perhaps a few local peculiarities at Danzig, and until I reach northern Italy my attention will be confined to the more universal building material - stone.

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