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06, No. 03, March 1900, by Various

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THE
Brochure Series
OF ARCHITECTURAL
ILLUSTRATION.

1900.

MARCH

No. 2.

SPANISH WROUGHT-IRON SCREENS.

From earliest times the numerous iron mines which exist in Spain, especially in the Cantabrian provinces, have been worked, and their presence has developed in that country excellent objects of art in metal at all times; but owing to the perishable character of iron, the slight intrinsic value of the material, and the little care taken of such fabrics, examples of very early specimens, with the exception of a few interesting ones which have reached us from the Spanish Arabs, have disappeared. The most interesting examples of Moorish manufacture which have survived are some iron keys of most delicate tracery. Their perfect state of preservation shows that they were used only as symbols of cities or fortresses, and, on given occasions, offered to kings or great people, and even in the present day in Spain this ceremony is kept up, and a key signifying the freedom of the palace, is offered to the foreign princes who stay at the royal residence in Madrid. In a similar manner, as far back as the middle ages, keys have been presented to Spanish sovereigns on occasions of their visits to such towns as Toledo and Seville; and a ceremony of swearing them to uphold the accorded privilege is gone through with,—a reminiscence probably of what occurred when these towns were conquered from the Moors. One of these keys at Valencia, belonging to Count de Trignona, measures nine and-a-half inches long, and was originally gilt. Its handle is closed and covered with delicate work in relief, and the wards are ornamented in the same manner with a combination of several words written in Cufic letters of difficult interpretation; but around the handle we can read distinctly in arabic the name of the artist: "It was made by Ahmel Ahsan." This key appears to date from the thirteenth or early fourteenth century, and two similar ones exist in the Town Hall of Valencia.

Worthy objects of iron work must have been made by Christian artists of this period in Spain, for, although no specimens have come down to us, we have historical information which confirms such a conclusion. In the ordinances of Barcelona we find it recorded that the iron-smiths formed an extensive guild in the thirteenth century, and that in 1257 four of its members were officers of the Chief Municipal Council; and other similar records substantiate the fact that this guild increased in importance during the succeeding centuries. The ordinances of Seville of the fifteenth century, which were reformed in 1502, and those of Toledo, also revised in 1582, will give the student an idea of what was done by workers of metals at this period, the method of workmanship and other interesting details. The ordinances of Seville mention *rejas* made in Biscay, and give a good idea of the styles adopted by the iron-masters there, and the ordinances of Granada repeat, almost exactly, the former descriptions.

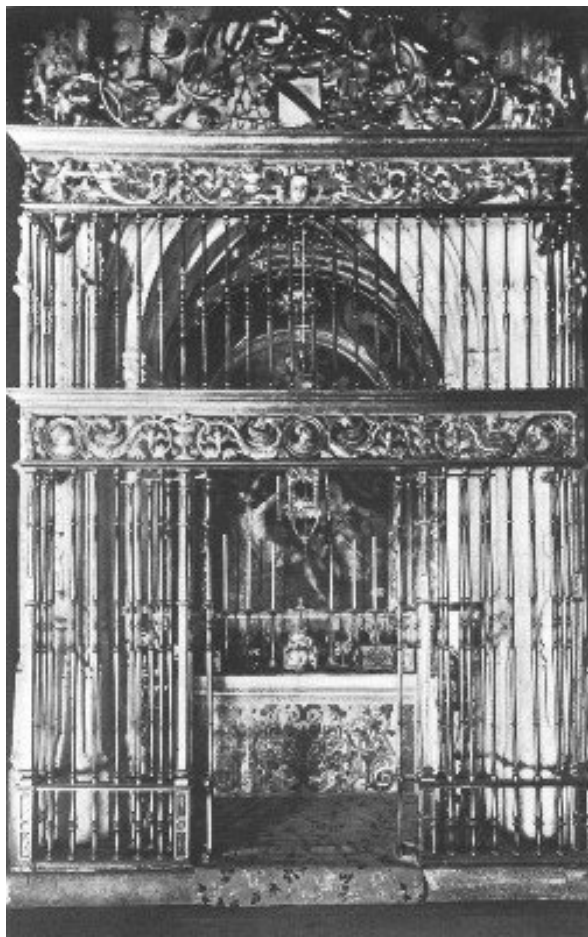
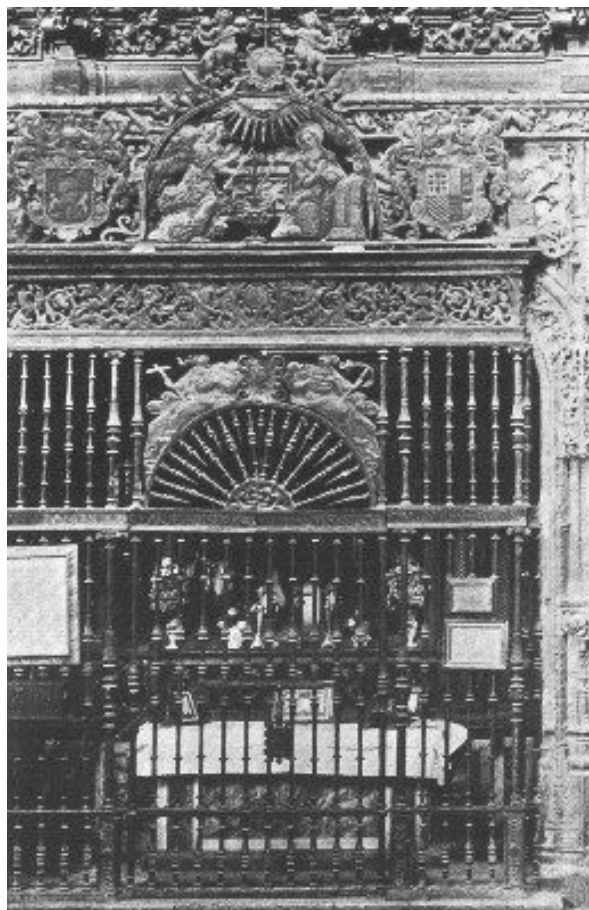


PLATE XX SCREEN, "ALTAR DE LA GAMBA," SEVILLE CATHEDRAL

The modern history of iron work in Spain begins, however, with the second half of the fifteenth century. From this period on, the art continued to progress, and in the sixteenth century Spain produced works of art in wrought iron which were unrivalled in Europe.

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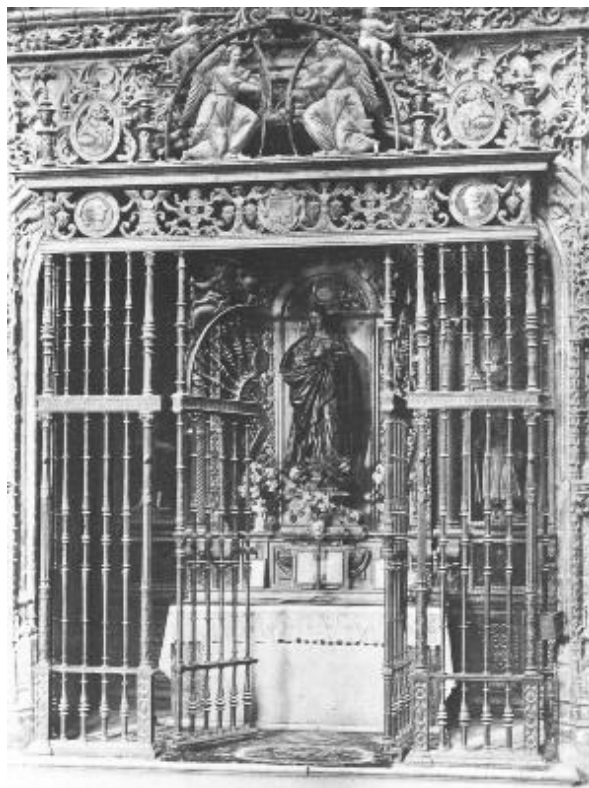
The most beautiful and characteristic productions of the Spanish iron-smiths were the openwork screens or grilles, especially the *rejas*, or chancel screens, enclosing the chapels in the cathedrals; and these last deserve special attention, from the beauty of their forms, the quality of their workmanship and the intrinsic variety of their models.



The interior arrangement of Spanish cathedrals differs somewhat from that of churches in other parts of Europe. In Spain, the choir proper, or *coro*, is transferred to the nave, of which it commonly occupies the western half, and a passage, usually protected by low iron or brass railings, leads from the eastern gate of the *coro* to the screen in front of the high altar. This arrangement is necessary because, as the choir proper is deep, the people must be kept from pressing on the clergy as they pass to and fro, during the service, in the long passage from the altar to the *coro*. High metal screens or *rejas* are also placed across the entrance to the choir or "capilla mayor," as its eastern part is called. Owing to this form of interior arrangement the cathedrals and churches of Spain lent themselves admirably to the construction of objects of all kinds in ornamental iron work; and from the earliest times when such records were kept, we meet with many names of iron-masters who were apparently attached to the different cathedrals in the same manner as were the painters and artists.

One of the finest specimens of this artistic industry (and we place it first because it is a typical example) is the splendid *reja* which divides the nave from the "Royal Chapel" in the Cathedral of Granada (Plate [XIX](#)).

This Cathedral is, on the whole, the best Renaissance building in Spain, and in plan one of the finest churches in Europe; and the "Royal Chapel" is the most interesting feature of its interior. This Chapel was erected in the late Gothic style, in 1506-17, for the reception of the tombs of the "Catholic Kings," and was afterwards enlarged by Charles V., who found it "too small for so great glory." Besides the tombs of Ferdinand and Isabella it contains those of the parents of Charles V.



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**PLATE
XXI**

**CHAPEL SCREEN, SEVILLE
CATHEDRAL**

The *reja* which guards it was completed about 1522, by the celebrated Bartolomé of Jaen, who also worked at Seville, and whom the records of the time describe as "sculptor and iron-master." Its important size enabled the artist to carry out a splendid scheme of ornamentation in the "plateresque" style, combined with reliefs, on a large scale, of figures of apostles and saints, terminating at the upper part with a wide ornamental band of conventional floral decoration in relief, crowned with a Crucifixion, with the Virgin and Saint John on either side. The ornamentation was originally gilded and the figures painted in oil colors. The balustrades and supports are forged with the hammer. The figures and circular piers are formed of large plates, *repoussé* and carved in a most admirable manner, and an examination of them will give a good idea of the technical mastery over the material which the artists of this time had attained long before the various mechanical facilities of the present day existed.

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This *reja* at Granada is entirely of iron, which most Spanish *rejas* are not, and is the earliest specimen of anything like equal importance in Spain. It has been chosen as the first specimen to be here described, not only because of the early date of its construction, but because it excellently illustrates the salient merits of the best type of Spanish cathedral screen. The first of these merits is a general transparency,—a highly important quality in a wrought-iron screen so placed, for if such a screen be covered with sufficient ornament to arrest the eye on its surface when viewing the interior of the cathedral as a whole, it detracts from the general architectural effect, serving indeed, to block the nave as a wall where no wall was intended. In such a screen

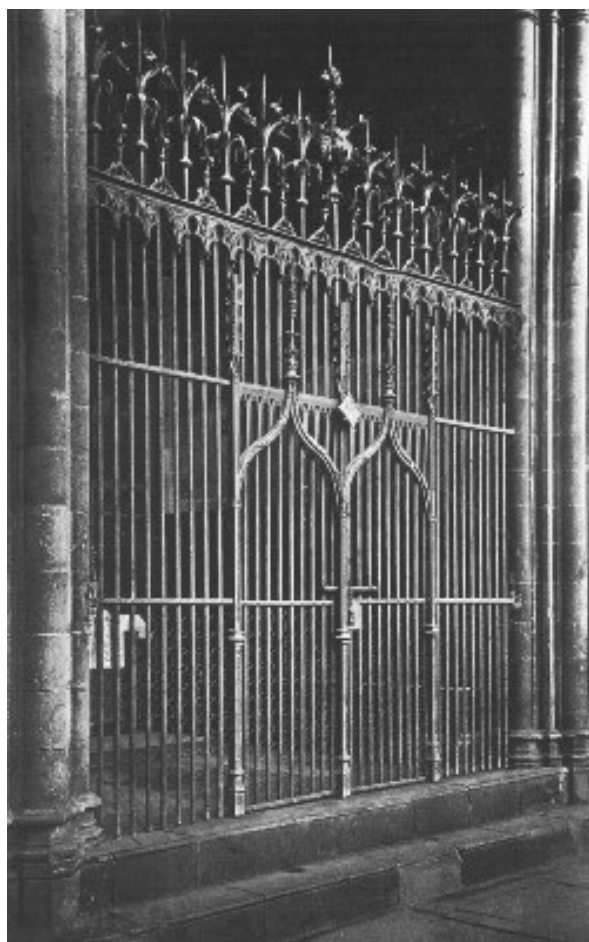
as the present one, however, the slight vertical piers almost disappear unless the sight be focussed upon them, while the ornamental portions seem apparently suspended in mid air and do not in any way injure the general architectural scheme or decrease the apparent space. The rectangularity of the design gives great repose; and the division into departments, which allows of the concentration of strength in skeleton lines, affords sufficient constructional stiffness without involving too much formality. The design is both beautiful and appropriate. At the summit the crucifixion, below the leading incidents of biblical history, and, in a central panel about twenty feet square, grouped in a decorative design, the full heraldic insignia of the monarchs who repose in the tombs which the screen guards. The lock bears a small inscription giving the name of the artist, "Maestro Bartolomé me fec."

To consider in detail the multitude of similar rich and beautiful railings which happily survive in Spanish cathedrals and churches, would be impossible, even were it possible to illustrate them; but, for the most part, they have never been drawn or photographed, and a brief description of those illustrated in our plates must here suffice.

The Cathedral of Seville is undoubtedly one of the largest, handsomest and richest Gothic churches in Christendom, and was once a veritable museum of works of art. An old saying groups the chief churches of Spain together as "*Toledo la rica, Salamanca la fuerte, Leon la bella, Oviedo la sacra, e Sevilla la grande.*" It originally contained some very beautiful *rejas*, including two famous ones by Sancho Muñoz; but these with many other art treasures, were destroyed by the twice falling of the dome, first in 1511 and again in 1888, due to earthquake shocks. The three chapel screens shown in our illustrations (Plates [XX](#), [XXI](#), and [page 41](#)) remain, however, to show how rich in iron work this Cathedral originally must have been. The names of the artists of these screens are not certainly known. The "Altar de la Gamba," shown in Plate [XX](#), derives its curious name, "The Altar of the Leg," from the finely painted leg of Adam in the picture which adorns the shrine, representing our first parents adoring the Virgin.

The Cathedral of Barcelona, one of the noblest creations of Spanish Gothic, stands upon the highest point of the ancient city, on a site originally occupied by a Roman temple and later by a Moorish mosque. On the southwest the cathedral is adjoined by magnificent Gothic cloisters, finished in 1448. Along the northwest side of these cloisters is a row of chapels, placed back to back with the chapels of the southwest aisle of the church. The entrances to these chapels are closed by iron grilles of simple but dignified design. One of them is shown in our illustration (Plate [XXII](#)).

Although the cathedral of Avila was commenced in 1091 its general character is that of the end of the twelfth or early part of the thirteenth century, though the solemn and dignified interior is designed in a style of a later date. Besides the beautiful *reja* here shown (Plate [XXIII](#)), which divides the high altar from the church proper, it contains a fine iron pulpit ([page 47](#).)



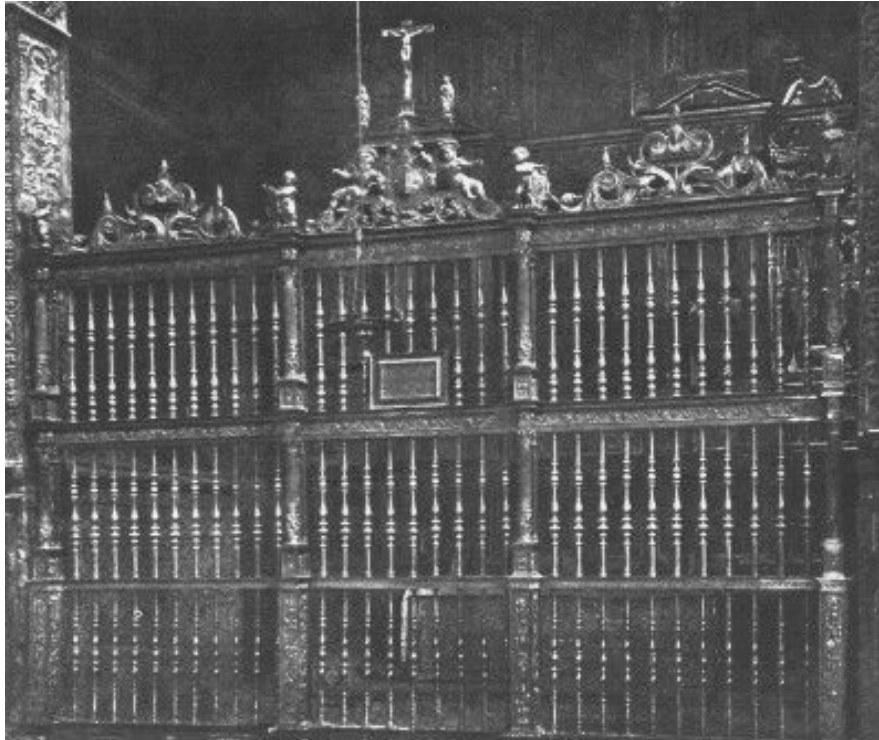
[Pg 44]

**PLATE
XXII**

**CLOISTER SCREEN, BARCELONA
CATHEDRAL**

Iron pulpits, so rare elsewhere, have been made in Spain with great success. The one here illustrated shows a mixture of Gothic and Renaissance detail, but the whole is of contemporary workmanship, and presents an interesting example of the transitional style. The primitive method of working through thin plates superimposed to form tracery is here adhered to, and the whole is applied to a wooden framework. The pulpit was originally gilt. It dates from the end of the fifteenth century, and shows the influence of the Flemish masters who at about that period set so many fashions in Burgos and its vicinity. The wrought-iron screen (shown on [page 47](#)), now preserved in the collection of the Louvre, belongs to the same time, and is of the same style of workmanship.

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**SCREEN, ZAPORTA
CHAPEL**

**CHURCH OF LA SEO,
SARAGOSSA**

The interior of the cathedral of Burgos is, from its lofty spacious proportions, one of the finest in Spain, and is surrounded, unsymmetrically but not unpicturesquely, by fourteen chapels, all distinguished by some particular beauty of construction or ornamentation. The chief of these chapels, situated at the east end of the cathedral, is the gorgeous "Capilla del Condestable," built for Don Pedro Fernandez de Velasco, hereditary Constable of Castile, in 1487. This chapel contains superbly sculptured tombs of the Constable and his wife, and the lofty *reja* (Plate [XXVI.](#)) which guards the entrance to it has been considered one of the finest specimens of its kind, owing to the perfection with which every detail is carried out. It is the master-piece of Cristoval de Andino, and was constructed in 1523. A contemporary writer describing it says: "Good workmen, and those who wish that their work may have authority and be blameless, must endeavor to be guided by ancient models, as was your fellow citizen Cristoval de Andino; and his works are thereby more elegant and excellent than any others which I have seen up to the present time. If you think otherwise, judge of his work by looking at the *reja* which he is making for your lord, the Constable, which is undoubtedly superior to all those that have hitherto been made in Spain." The centre of the upper part of the *reja* bears the signature of the artist, "Ab. Andino, A.D. MDXXIII."

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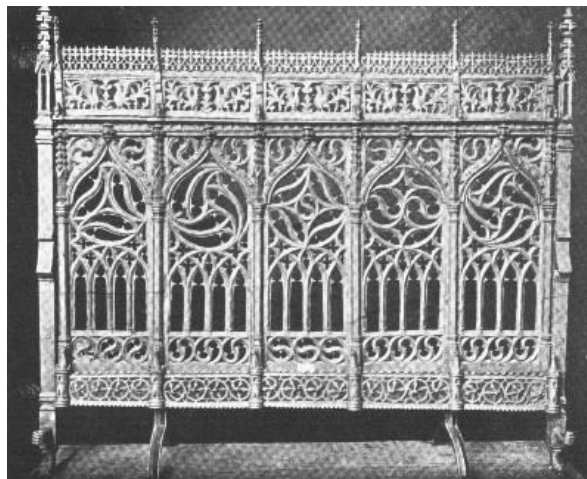


PLATE XXIII

SCREEN, AVILA CATHEDRAL

The famous University of Salamanca was originally built in 1415, but in 1480 the upper part was entirely reconstructed in the most brilliant "plateresque" style, by the "Catholic Kings." The various offices of the University are grouped around a simple, cloister-like court; and on the west side of the second floor is the Library, which contains 80,000 volumes, and is said to have been founded by Alfonso the Learned in 1254. The entrance to this Library is closed by the beautiful wrought grille shown in Plate [XXIV](#). The exact date and the authorship of the grille are unknown.

[Pg 47]



SPANISH WROUGHT-IRON SCREEN LOUVRE

The Church of San Juan de la Penitencia is a jumble of curious styles. Built by the Cardinal Ximenez in 1514, a semi-Moorish palace was partially incorporated with it, and it contains much interesting Moorish decoration. The ceiling of the nave and choir is Moorish, the portal and choir windows are Gothic, several of the altars are baroque, and the elaborate *reja*, here reproduced (Plate [XXV](#).) is a fine specimen of "plateresque" iron-work.

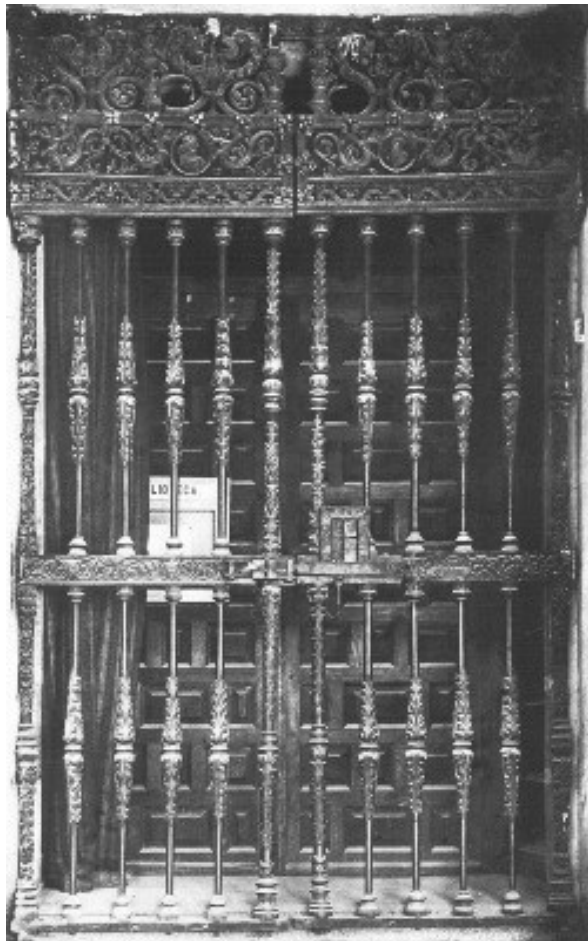


WROUGHT-IRON PULPIT AVILA CATHEDRAL

The old Cathedral of Saragossa is called "La Seo," par excellence, to distinguish it from the other called "del Pilar," "seo" being the usual term for the principal church. It was erected in 1119-1520 on the site of the principal mosque of the Moors, and the general arrangement of the interior resembles that of a mosque. The sides are flanked with chapels; and the Chapel of Zaporta (Zaporta was a rich citizen of the city who died early in the sixteenth century) is shut off by an iron screen, of excellent workmanship in the less elaborate "plateresque" style, shown in the small engraving on [page 45](#).

After the sixteenth century smiths' work in Spain declined in artistic interest and importance. The abilities of the iron-workers were devoted to constructing objects on a smaller scale, such as door locks, clock ornaments and the like; the arts of inlaying iron-work with gold and silver sprung into prominence, and Spanish artists practically ceased to undertake the great carved and chiselled grilles which have formed the subject of this paper.

S. F. N.



**PLATE
XXIV**

**SCREEN, ENTRANCE TO
LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF
SALAMANCA**

XII. Century Capitals from the Benedictine Monastery, Monreale

The Cathedral church of Santa Maria Nuova, with its adjoining Benedictine monastery and cloister, were erected at Monreale (pronounced Mur-ri-a-li by its Sicilian inhabitants) by William II. of Sicily in 1174-82.



CAPITAL FROM MONREALE

This splendid work of Norman-Sicilian artists is Latin in its shape, Roman in its colonnade, Byzantine in its mosaics, Greek in its sculpture, Saracenic and Norman in its many mouldings, exhibiting a most curious combination of styles. The names of the architects are unknown (the naïve Vasari attributes this to "their stupidity or contempt of fame"), but the evidence afforded by a careful examination of the mosaics, establishes the conclusion that King William intrusted the embellishment to Greek, that is to say, Byzantine, artists or to their Sicilian disciples. At any rate, the artists who embellished Monreale in the latter part of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth centuries were in every way the equals in artistic abilities of the Italian masters who lived and worked a century later; and when we talk of the Renaissance we should not forget

that long before its advent these Sicilian artists had here produced work that today challenges the wonder and admiration of critics.

"Other cathedrals," says Mr. Symonds, "may surpass that of Monreale in sublimity, bulk, strength or unity of plan. None can surpass it in the strange romance with which the memory of its many artificers invests it. None can exceed it in the richness and glory, the gorgeousness of a thousand decorative elements."



CAPITAL FROM MONREALE



CAPITAL FROM MONREALE

Of the original buildings of the Benedictine monastery which formed a part of the church, and were built at the same time, none but the cloister remains. This cloister is in its kind one of the most superb examples of twelfth century architecture to be found in Europe, and is one of the largest as well as one of the most beautiful in the world. The cloisters of St. John Lateran, St. Paul-beyond-the-Walls, Ste. Scholastica, at Subiaco, are all admirable, but they are inferior to that of Monreale, both in detail and in grandeur of total effect.



PLATE XXV SCREEN, CHURCH OF SAN JUAN DE LA PENITENCIA, TOLEDO

[Pg 50]



CAPITAL FROM MONREALE



CAPITAL FROM MONREALE

Imagine a vast central space, one hundred and sixty-nine feet square,—not a flat grass-plot scattered with decaying tombs, nor planted with the severe box-wood and funereal cypresses that give so gloomy an aspect to most cloisters, but a blooming garden, adorned with shrubs and flowering vines, laid out in parterres of exquisite verdure, where, in the shade of myrtle and citron trees, fountains play, their jets caught in marble basins, only to overflow and nourish the living green about them. This garden is walled in by four long corridors, sheltered by arcades of small pointed arches with something Oriental in their curves, supported by two hundred and sixteen coupled columns of white marble, with a group of four at each angle, all of them surmounted by carved capitals of different designs, the slender shafts ornamented with mosaics and incrusted with precious marbles, some patterned in lozenges, some curved with floral designs, some fluted after the antique manner, some wound with capricious spirals,—a file of shining columns of fairy-like aspect. And, looking at this perennial garden with its ever-running fountains, surrounded by so Oriental an arcade, one might fancy one's self transported to a monastic Alhambra, or the interior of an Arabian-Night's palace.

[Pg 51]

The capitals of the shafts that uphold the arcade (and from the slenderness of these shafts it is probable that they were inserted some time after the heavier arcade was originally built), are all different. A number of them are here illustrated. In their design the sharp acanthus foliage of the Greeks is commingled with the emblems of Christianity, such as the circle, the cross, the vine and the dove, with infinitely ingenious grotesques of birds and animals, and with human figures. The latter are represented in Byzantine costume, and Greek inscriptions everywhere appear. The workmanship of these capitals, the delicate detail of the carving, showing the constant employment of the circular drill, the almost entire concealment of the background, are tokens of the craftsmanship of the twelfth century

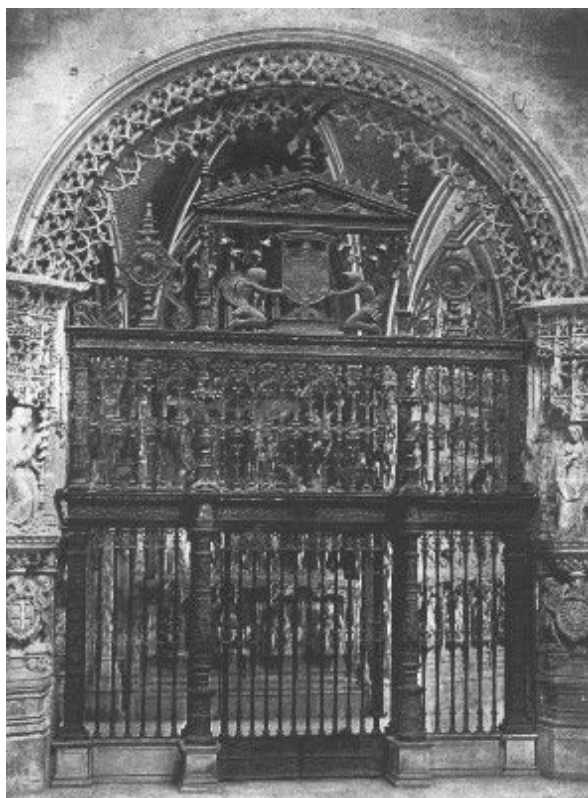
Byzantine Greeks Contemporary personages, scenes from the old and new Testaments, real and fantastic animals, leaves, flowers, fruit,—all are represented with a wonderful liveliness of expression and with prodigious fecundity of imagination. They exhibit, as M. Dantier has said: "*Toute la foi, toute la poésie du temps sculptées sur la pierre.*"

The cloister at Monreale has been illustrated, and other examples of its capitals shown, in THE BROCHURE SERIES, Volume 1895, No. 3, and in Volume 1898, No. 1.



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CAPITAL FROM MONREALE



**PLATE
XXVI**

**SCREEN, CHAPEL OF THE
CONSTABLE, BURGOS
CATHEDRAL**

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