

ON THE CHARACTERISTIC INTERPENETRATIONS OF THE FLAMBOYANT STYLE.

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AMONGST other characters that distinguish the later styles of Gothic on the continent from our own contemporary Perpendicular style, there may be observed a much greater and more fanciful intricacy of parts, contrived apparently more with a view to display difficulties overcome than beauties of art. Hence an excessive employment of interpenetrating surfaces, especially in the Flamboyant Style. In English examples a moulding may sometimes be found which penetrates some projecting member, and appears on the other side, as for example in *fig. 1*, which represents a portion of the base of one of the turrets of King's College Chapel. The string moulding at *A A* appears on the face of the plinths of the angle buttresses as if it had penetrated their substance, or rather the whole arrangement of the bases of the turrets and of the buttresses respectively, appears to suggest a mutual penetration or *interpenetration* of the two. Examples of this kind are not common in English work, and are confined merely to the interferences of adjacent necessary members of the architectural arrangement.

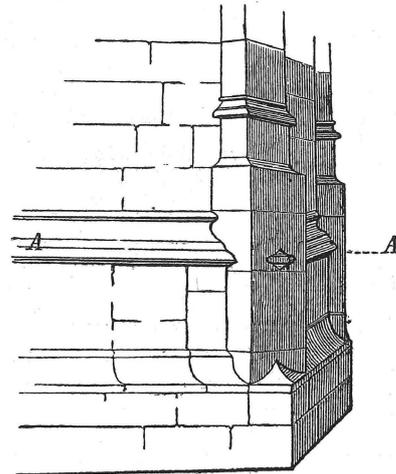


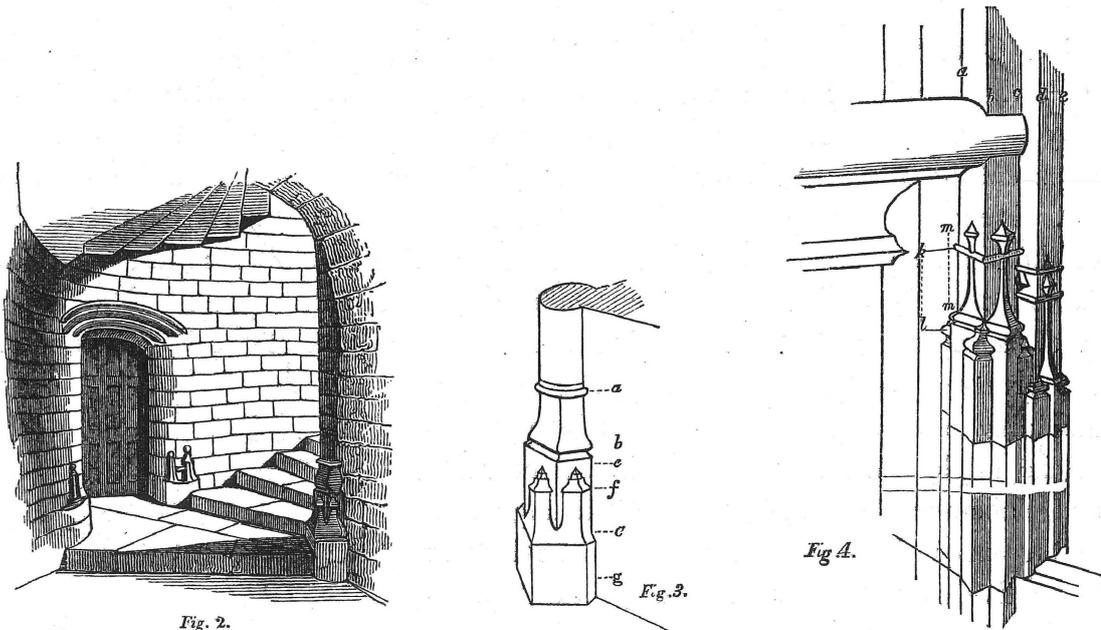
Fig. 1.

In the Flamboyant style, on the contrary, interpenetration occurs so frequently as to constitute a characteristic, and is produced not merely between two neighbouring architectural members, but new members are also introduced for the mere purpose of showing interpenetrations. Thus, as we shall see, two different bases may be given to the same shaft, or even two or more different turrets with pinnacles may be placed in an identical

position on the plan, and made to interfere and interpenetrate throughout their entire height from the base upwards in a manner that defies description, and can only be illustrated by drawings.

It may perhaps be found that this character only belongs to one period or one district of the Flamboyant style; my opportunities of observing examples have been scarcely sufficient to enable me to decide this point; but my present object is to explain and define a practice which I know to be sufficiently extensive to constitute a distinguishing characteristic, and not to be merely an individual caprice. The few examples that I am going to produce must be looked upon as specimens of an entire class of similar ones.

The bottom of a spiral staircase in the Palace at Nevers (*fig. 2*) exhibits two



characteristic specimens of interpenetration; in the doorway and in the base of the column which forms the newel of the stairs. This column (*vide fig. 3*) is furnished with the usual base mouldings, *a, b*, and polygonal plinth, *b, c*, but in addition to this another complete base with mouldings and polygonal plinth, *e, f, g*, is added below, and made to show interpenetrations by having its faces set opposite to the angles of the upper base.

Fig. 4 is a sketch of base mouldings from a rich screen in the cathedral at Chartres, which separates the choir from its side aisles. The forms to which the bases are applied consist of rectangular projections, *a b c, c d e*. The first of these has a base with the usual mouldings, *k, l*, and also an interpenetrating base of a similar profile, *m, m*, but set anglewise, and not as in the last example

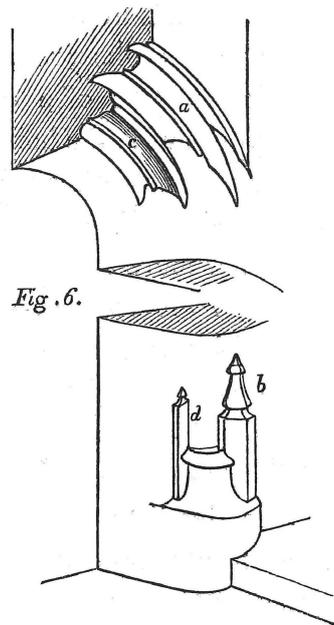
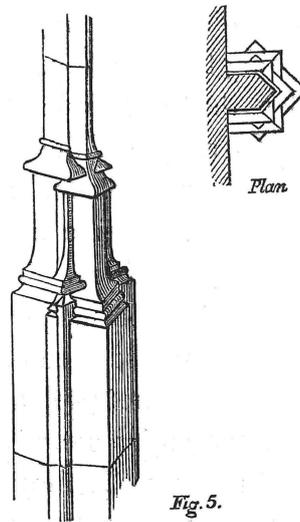
completely below the first base, but arranged with its mouldings each a little above the corresponding moulding of the first base *k, l*, in order to display the interpenetration more completely. The neighbouring projection *c, d, e*, has a pair of bases of the same kind, but carefully managed so as to avoid any appearance of continuity or connexion with either base of the projection *a, b, c*, and thus to increase the complication of effect.

Fig. 5 is an example from the same screen, but showing perhaps still more ingenuity in the production of complicated interferences. The member to which this base is applied is a plain prism terminating upwards in a pinnacle; its form appears from the *plan* in the margin, which shows its horizontal section immediately above the base.

Instead of mitring the base mouldings round this prism, which would be the natural arrangement for a single architectural member, the base is applied on the supposition that this prism consists of two interpenetrating square prisms, one of which is set anglewise with respect to the other, and the base mouldings of the latter are placed a little lower down than those of the former, so as to produce the interpenetrations which are clearly shown in the drawing.

This prism has a few usual mouldings added to it near the upper extremity by way of capital below the pinnacle. These, which I have not shown in the drawing, are treated precisely in the same manner as the base mouldings.

To return to the doorway, *fig. 2*, of which the mouldings and base are shown on a larger scale at *fig. 6*. The mouldings of this doorway are made to die against the vertical surface of the piers in a manner very usual in Gothic architecture, and to which I have ventured elsewhere to assign the name of a discontinuous impost. So far this doorway presents nothing different from many others in the contemporaneous or previous styles. At the base of the piers, however, some architectural ornaments are shown, which constitute the peculiar Flamboyant character to which I wish to



direct attention. These ornaments, marked *b* and *d* (*fig. 6*), upon examination resolve themselves into prominent edges of the regular bases of the arch mouldings *a* and *c* (*fig. 6*), which interpenetrate the pier, and so show themselves, together with the requisite portion of the plinth mouldings.

To make this more intelligible, I have drawn in *fig. 7*, on the same scale and from the same point of view, the complete base that would have been given to these arch mouldings, supposing them to have been continued down the sides of the pier, the arch having a *continuous impost*.

In simple Flamboyant examples such a base would have been employed, and indeed one very similar may be seen on the same staircase applied to the mouldings of the window sides. This figure compared with *fig. 6* will explain the forms which the bases *d* and *b* assume by piercing the surface of the plain rounded pier with which they interpenetrate, and in whose substance they are thus supposed to exist with the entire set of mouldings.

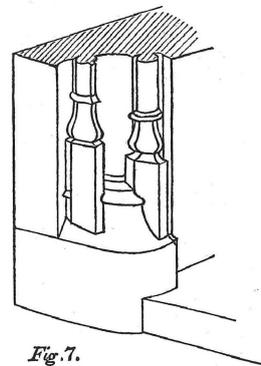


Fig. 7.

In many Flamboyant examples small knobs and projections like *b* and *d* (*fig. 6*) may be observed, and on a superficial view might pass for mere unmeaning ornaments, but will be found explicable upon this system of interpenetration. *Fig. 8* is a window (from a house near Roanne), at the base of whose mullions knobs may be observed, which really represent the Gothic base of a square mullion on the same plinth with the hollow chamfered mullion, and interpenetrating with it. *Fig. 9* is the base of a mullion from a house at Vienne, somewhat more complex, but intelligible on a similar supposition.

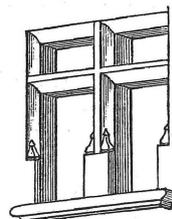


Fig. 8.

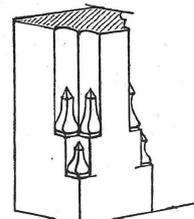


Fig. 9.

Fig. 10 is an example of a class of interpenetration still bolder than any we have hitherto examined, and in which two or more complete architectural members are supposed to coexist in the same spot and to interpenetrate throughout their entire height.

This example is a rich doorway in the north transept of the cathedral at Nevers, leading to one of those fanciful and characteristic spiral staircases which frequently occur in the Flamboyant churches. The composition is similar to that of Gothic doorways in general, consisting of an archway decorated with rich continuous mouldings and a transom of the Flamboyant form, over which is a group of sculpture, not represented in the sketch. The archway is sur-

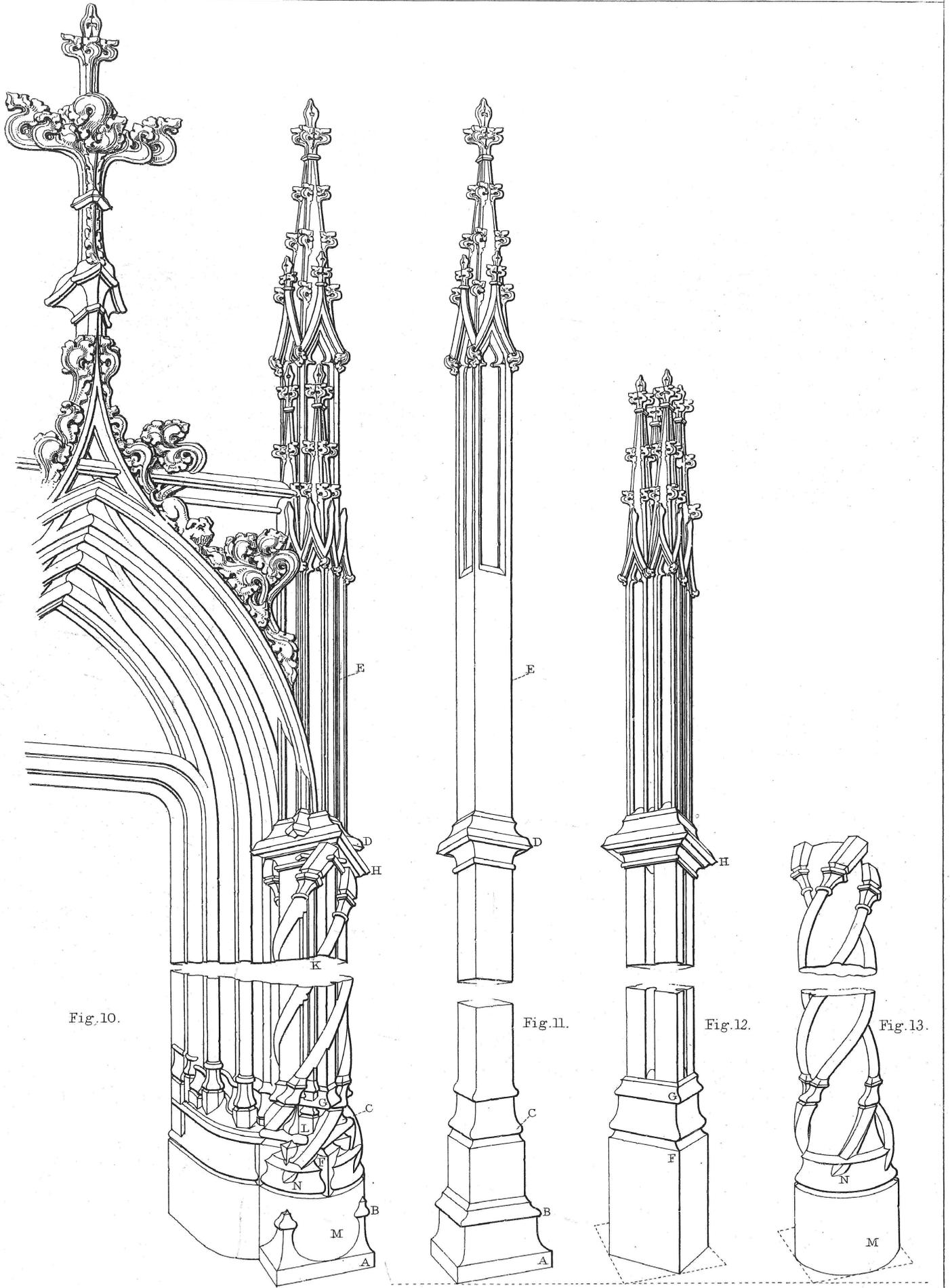


Fig. 10.

Fig. 11.

Fig. 12.

Fig. 13.

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mounted by an ogee canopy, with large crockets, and animals, and a spreading finial; and the whole is flanked by piles of pinnacles, to which I must direct particular attention as containing the interpenetrations in question.

The pier of the doorway is considerably higher than in the drawing, but as it was necessary to show the interpenetrations on a large scale, the pier is represented as fractured in the middle, and a portion containing one entire turn of the spiral column is omitted. I must also remark that the details of the foliage and crocketing of the upper part are not very accurately represented, as for want of time a very hasty sketch of these parts was taken; but that the interpenetrating mouldings are drawn with sufficient care and precision.

The vertical piers with pinnacles which flank the composition, one only of which is shown in the sketch, present at the base and impost a confused knot of architectural details, interlacing and interpenetrating each other in every possible manner. An accurate examination shows that this complication is produced by the co-existence upon the plan of three distinct architectural members, each having its own set of mouldings.

I have drawn these separately in *figs. 11, 12, and 13*, on the same scale and from the same point of view as in the group; and by comparing them singly with *fig. 10*, by help of the corresponding letters of reference, the mystery of its complication will be easily unravelled.

The first (*fig. 11*) is a square shaft or pedestal with base and cap mouldings, surmounted by a square pannelled shaft terminated upwards by a pinnacle of the usual form with gables, crockets, and a finial. The plinth of this shaft exhibits itself at the bottom of the pier at *A*; its base mouldings may be detected by their angles, as at *B* and *C*. The mouldings of the cap also show their corners, as at *D*. The vertical edges of the pedestal are prominent between the spiral shafts, and the vertical edges of the upper shaft are also shown, as at *E*, while the pinnacle rises clear and detached above the whole.

The second member (*fig. 12*) is also a square pedestal with base and cap mouldings; but it is set lozengewise with respect to the wall, so that its angles fall opposite the faces of the former one. Its mouldings are somewhat different, and carefully placed at a different level. Its shaft being divided or split into four, allows the edges of the first one to exhibit themselves more clearly; and above its cap it carries a group of four separate shafts pannelled and surmounted each by a pinnacle with gables, crockets, and finials complete. The upper part of its square plinth and the greater portion in length of its base mouldings show themselves, as at *F* and *G*. The faces of its square shaft are also visible, and the mouldings of the cap, the entire prominent edge of which

is seen at *H*, as well as the outer faces of the panelled pinnacle shafts above. The pinnacles themselves are of course half absorbed in the square shaft, which rises through them, and against which they appear to be applied.

The third member of this intricate mass is the group of twisted shafts (*fig. 13*). This rises no higher than the caps of the former pedestals. It consists of a cylindrical or spiral column with a cylindrical plinth and base mouldings, round which are twisted four slender shafts, each having its own plinth, base, and capital complete, the plinths interpenetrating with the base moulding of the cylindrical column. The place of this in the general mass is so clearly shown in *fig. 10*, as scarcely to require letters of reference, *M* and *N*, which, however, show two corresponding points.

But in addition to these three principal parts, *figs. 11, 12, and 13*, it will be observed that the fillet of the dripstone of the canopy is continued downwards upon the face of the pier at *K*, and is provided with a small separate base and plinth at *L*, which base interpenetrates the upper base moulding of *fig. 12*.

As other instances of the same principle may be remarked the manner in which the ogee mouldings are given to every one of the arch-head mouldings, as well as the interpenetration of the horizontal string at *M* with the ogee head. But such simple cases as these may be seen in English or German examples. Also small pinnacles may be found in all the Gothic styles applied lozengewise against the shafts of large ones. But they are always so disposed as to appear as if they were so applied, and not as portions of one entire composition standing upon the same plan as the central one, as in this and other Flamboyant specimens.

As another example we may take *fig. 14*, "le piédestal de S. Clotilde," in Evreux Cathedral. This consists of two entire members, interpenetrating from the base to the top of the whole.

One of these is a spiral column somewhat similar to *fig. 13*, but in this case consisting of three shafts only, which terminate upwards with great elegance, supporting the branching ribs of small vaults which carry an hexagonal crown, forming the table of the pedestal.

The other member is an ordinary square shaft with panelled sides, base mouldings, and plinth at *a*, with gables crockets and finial of the usual form at *b, b*, surmounted by a pinnacle with crockets and finial. These crockets may be seen at *cc, dd, ee*, but since from

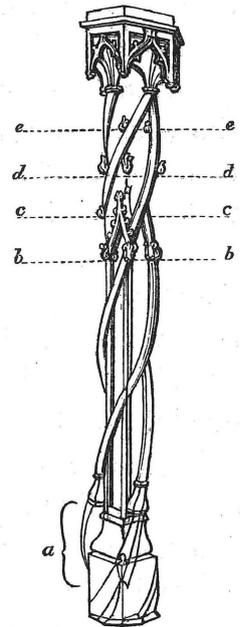


Fig. 14.

the pyramidal form of the pinnacle they retire inwards as they rise in succession, they are in the original carefully and accurately represented as gradually absorbed in the substance of the spiral column; the upper crockets and finial are of course entirely concealed and buried in it.

In Germany and in the Low Countries the later styles of Gothic are worked with a profusion of interpenetrating and interlacing mouldings, but these are always confined to the interferences that can be produced between the details of neighbouring architectural members, and are therefore to be considered as belonging to the same class as the similar examples that occasionally occur in English work, but as carried to a greater excess; and indeed the Flamboyant specimens abound with this kind of enrichment, in addition to the peculiar kind of it which this essay is intended to point out.

The distinguishing characteristic of the Flamboyant interpenetration will now, I hope, have been made clearer by the examples explained in the drawings, namely, that the interferences are produced not merely between neighbouring architectural members, but by placing two coexisting members of the same kind in the same place, and by making their forms or their relative position different, so to produce the desired intricacy of effect.

Thus *figs. 3, 4, 5, 8, and 9*, are examples of two co-existing bases; and in the doorway of *fig. 2* we have two co-existing piers on each side of a single arch; for since the base of the pier has been shown to be that which belongs not to the actual pier but to the one that is supposed to interpenetrate with it, the co-existence of this last with the actual one is immediately suggested when the artifice is explained.

In the two last examples, *figs. 10 and 14*, this principle of co-existence is carried out much more completely by extending it from parts to wholes.

Having thus shown that the cases I have selected have a common principle, and one which is characteristic of local practice, I trust that a sufficient apology is offered for the length at which I have thought it necessary to explain and examine them.

July 2, 1840.

TRANSACTIONS

OF THE

ROYAL INSTITUTE OF BRITISH ARCHITECTS

OF

LONDON.

VOL. I. PART II.

USUI CIVIUM, DECORI URBIUM.

LONDON:

LONGMAN, BROWN, GREEN, AND LONGMANS.

1842.