
Introduction

Old age was no shipwreck for August Reichensperger. On March 22, 1890, the day he turned eighty-two, he was as usual in the middle of things. Except for some progressive deafness and a trembling in his hands that had afflicted him for decades, he was in robust health. He was writing an article for the *Koblenzer Volkszeitung*, firing off another feisty salvo of his views on the latest spurt of urban growth in Koblenz. Various letters needed to be written, and he was awaiting word from Paul Wallot in response to his latest missive, insisting that the architect should renounce the classicism of his Reichstag building and take up the cause of Gothic architecture. But on this day he put such pressing matters aside for the usual round of birthday visits. Among those who called at Klapperhof 14 in central Cologne to pay tribute was the young Catholic historian Ludwig Pastor.

Reichensperger's second-floor study was a mirror of his life.¹ Everything was Gothic. The room was dominated by his paper-strewn desk and the great neogothic chair designed by his friend George Gilbert Scott, the English architect. Above the desk hung a ten-foot-long view of the Rhine shore of Cologne in the Middle Ages, a reproduction of an old woodcut. Beside it were views of Gothic buildings, medieval and modern. There were images of the Cathedral of Antwerp, the Stefansdom in Vienna, the Rathaus in Münster, and even Scott's own Nikolaikirche in Hamburg. Across the room were portraits of Reichensperger's friends and of Europe's Catholic religious and political leaders. Alongside the popes Pius IX and Leo XIII hung portraits of Daniel O'Connell, the Irish activist, and Charles de Montalambert, the French parliamentarian and author. Dominating all was the death mask of Joseph Görres, the champion of Rhenish religious and political freedom.

It was not here that Pastor was led, but to the anteroom of the study, a room paneled almost entirely with bookshelves. In this quiet room, surrounded by engravings by Dürer and portraits of Memling, Raphael, and Peter Cornelius, Reichensperger kept his diaries. Dating back to the 1830s, these small, leather-bound volumes recorded in painstaking detail the entire course of Reichensperger's private and public life. He and Pastor had often reminisced about that life since

meeting in the early 1870s, and the younger scholar had proved an eager listener. Now, on the afternoon of his birthday, Reichensperger gestured to his diaries and other papers. His wife had joined them in the meantime. Upon his death, so he instructed her, Pastor was to receive the papers. The work of assembling the biography of the leader of Germany's Gothic Revival was to be his.²

Reichensperger had reason in 1890 to contemplate his past and muse about his legacy. The year marked the fiftieth anniversary of his campaign for the completion of Cologne Cathedral and the beginning of his lifetime crusade for Gothic architecture. At the same time, architectural taste was undergoing upheaval and it was becoming clear that the century's final decade would witness a resurgence of Romanesque architecture in Germany, forming a coda to the Gothic Revival. The Gothic movement was ending as it had begun, jostling for position among a crowd of contending round-arched, classical, and synthetic styles.

When Reichensperger died in 1895 Pastor was ready. Seldom was a biography prepared with more love—or with more Teutonic thoroughness. Within weeks of Reichensperger's death Pastor had written to every one of his important correspondents, or their estates, asking for the return of Reichensperger's letters. From throughout Germany, from France, from Belgium, from England the letters returned, accompanied by outpourings of grief and testimonials to Reichensperger. (In Ramsgate, the daughter of the great English architect A. W. N. Pugin recalled fondly, "He was a most wonderful man.")³ In 1899, four years after his death, there appeared Pastor's monumental and superbly researched biography, *August Reichensperger 1808–1895: Sein Leben und sein Wirken*. This two-volume study crowned years of research and deliberation by a historian who would later win fame for his history of the popes. The biography was a definitive history of the man. His reputation seemed assured.

August Reichensperger (1808–95) was the central figure of the German Gothic Revival from the middle of the 1840s until his death (Fig. 1). With his dedication to the cause of completing Cologne Cathedral, beginning in 1840, he helped to make the Catholic Rhineland the center of the movement. A member of the Prussian Parliament and later of the Reichstag, he used those chambers as a pulpit from which to plead the cause of medieval architecture. As a tireless author and journalist he wrote the critical manifestos on which that revival was based; among the most important was *Die christlich-germanische Baukunst und ihr Verhältnis zur Gegenwart* (1845), which immediately became the central statement of German neogothic theory. Reichensperger also befriended Germany's leading Gothic architects: Georg Gottlob Ungewitter, Vincenz Statz, Friedrich von Schmidt, and Conrad Wilhelm Hase. By



1. August Reichensperger, c. 1872.

their willingness to follow his theoretical leadership they created an architecture that embodied his doctrine. Committed to historical fidelity and opposed to a progressive, developmental view of architecture; insisting on masonry construction according to thirteenth-century models and rejecting modern materials; convinced that Gothic architecture reflected laws of geometric order, and suspicious of architectural invention and experimentation, Reichensperger, more than any other man, determined what the buildings of the German Gothic Revival would look like.

Furthermore, Reichensperger helped to determine what the restorations of the Gothic Revival would look like. In his *Fingerzeige auf dem Gebiete der kirchlichen Kunst* (1854) he codified in great detail the principles for the restoration of medieval buildings. By arguing against the restoration of a building to a single point in time; by speaking for the preservation of Renaissance or rococo features in older churches; by insisting that the patina of age must be maintained and the illusion of newness resisted, Reichensperger helped to establish the mature standards for restoration that became generally accepted in Germany during his lifetime.

Nonetheless, despite this great catalogue of achievement and despite the diligence of Pastor's biography, the full measure of Reichensperger's achievement has yet to be taken. Several factors have conspired against him. Among these, ironically, was Pastor's biography. It was a consummate effort, painstakingly assembled from diaries, letters, and hundreds of articles and book reviews, and reflected decades of interviews with Reichensperger, from as far back as 1872.⁴ This embarrassment of riches hurt the book. Large passages from Reichensperger's works and correspondence cluttered it; quotations took the place of analysis. The text also suffered because of Pastor's relative indifference to the nuances of architecture. Ignorant of the relationship of the German to the English Gothic Revival and privately unconvinced of the superiority of Gothic architecture, Pastor was perhaps not the best man to depict the arbiter of Gothic taste.

Pastor's study, for all its faults, has remained the definitive biography of Reichensperger. Thorough and exhaustive, it acted as a deterrent to further research. Meanwhile, during the early twentieth century the memory of Reichensperger slipped quietly from public consciousness. He had always been a controversial figure who had had political foes at both ends of the ideological spectrum. Only in the Rhineland was he recalled with a kind of fondness.⁵ But even there embarrassment mixed with affection in these reminiscences. Reichensperger's dedication to the Gothic Revival seemed hopelessly quaint and anachronistic, and his later biographers treated his dogmatic views on art with condescension.

Reichensperger has also been poorly served by German political historiography, sharing the fate of many Catholic leaders of the nineteenth century. German history

writing has traditionally been divided into two schools, each with its own political biases. These can roughly be designated as a legitimatizing and a delegitimizing history. On the one hand was the more or less official view of German history, conservative in ideology and written to legitimize historical events and Germany's rulers. This official historiography is best represented in the works of Heinrich von Treitschke, who wrote from an emphatically Prussian perspective, and who has cast a lengthy shadow on German history writing in the twentieth century.⁶ As Treitschke saw it, German history before 1871 was the story of Prussia's rise to meet destiny. Violently anti-Catholic, Treitschke painted a savage picture of Germany's political Catholicism. Reichensperger himself was not mentioned. Although the general histories that followed in Treitschke's wake did not always share his hostility to the Catholic movement, they continued to downplay its importance. On the other hand, an alternative view of Germany's past, as told from the left end of the spectrum, has been generally Marxist in content. This historiography, by telling the story of the rise of Germany's progressive and democratic movements, has sought to delegitimize Germany's political history. According to this view a strand of progressive thought and action was always present in Germany, but time and time again this strand was strangled by the forces of reaction: after 1815 by Metternich, after 1848 by Prussia and Austria, after 1871 by Bismarck, and after 1933 by Hitler. This historical tradition, dominant in the decades following the Second World War, has suffered from its own biases, and has often been just as implacably hostile to the politics of Catholicism as to that of traditional Prussian conservatives. Generally distrustful of Catholicism and viewing it as one of the forces of reaction, these works have tended to suppress mention of the Catholic contribution to German liberal political history. Thus Reichensperger has received short shrift from historians outside of the Rhineland. Only very recently has the polarization among German historians begun to abate, and the recent history by Thomas Nipperdey is one of the first to present a more complete view of the Catholic Center party, and the movement it represented, in mid-nineteenth-century German politics.⁷

The critical step in the rehabilitation of Reichensperger's reputation came in 1968, with Günther Kokkelink's pioneering study of the nineteenth-century Hanover architect Conrad Wilhelm Hase.⁸ Hase was the most influential North German Gothic architect and the founder of the important Hanover School, although like Reichensperger he had been long forgotten. Kokkelink noted the connection between Reichensperger's theory and Hase's architecture, and was the first scholar to call attention to the importance of *Die christlich-germanische Baukunst* for the German Gothic Revival.

Other scholars followed Kokkelink's lead. Georg Germann's 1971 *The Gothic Revival: Sources, Influences and Ideas* examined Reichensperger's activities with the Cologne Cathedral building association, the Dombauverein. Stefan Muthesius looked at the connection between the English and the German Gothic Revivals in his *Das englische Vorbild* (1974), examining the role of Reichensperger's protégé Georg Ungewitter. Most recently, on the ninetieth anniversary of Reichensperger's death in 1985, an exhibition with a catalogue devoted to him was held at the Stadtbibliothek in Koblenz.⁹ By the 1980s Reichensperger's reputation was largely restored, although Pastor's biography still offered only a sketchy basis for the study of his architectural theory.

It has now become possible to begin to assess the role of August Reichensperger in nineteenth-century German history. Several building blocks are in place for such a reassessment. The Koblenz Landeshauptarchiv has assembled and catalogued a large part of Reichensperger's private papers.¹⁰ Through painstaking efforts, the Koblenz architectural historian Udo Liessem has uncovered another deposit of these papers (and also determined beyond all doubt that the balance of Reichensperger's letters and diaries—having survived the Second World War—were destroyed during the 1960s). Furthermore, the Koblenz Stadtbibliothek has brought together a good deal of material relating to Reichensperger and has begun to publish an annotated bibliography of his work, in the course of which virtually all of the items, well over six hundred, listed by Pastor in 1899 have been assembled.¹¹ This collection, along with the Reichensperger papers in the city archive, has made Koblenz a rich repository of material for a study of the man. Finally, a flurry of research into architectural history during the past two decades has amassed a prodigious amount of material on the Gothic Revival in Germany, its principal buildings and architects, and the international ideas that sustained it.

Several areas have long been in need of study: the nature of Reichensperger's ties to England, for example, and the way in which he mediated between the two countries' respective Gothic Revivals.¹² Furthermore, his activities in the area of architectural education—his attack on architectural bureaucracy and his praise for building lodges patterned on medieval precedent—were important and added to the peculiar texture of the German Gothic Revival. Perhaps most important, the interconnections between Reichensperger's political thought and his architectural thought need to be addressed. More than anything else, the distinctive cast of the Gothic Revival in Germany was the result of its profoundly political character. That character was in large measure the legacy of August Reichensperger and forms the central subject of this book.

I

August Reichensperger: Background, Biography, and Political Philosophy

The Gothic Revival of the nineteenth century was an international movement. So strong were the forces that underpinned it—the religious impulses, the artistic revelations, the historical longings—that national borders could not contain them. England, France, and Germany each came under the influence of the revival and other countries followed suit. During the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the period of the movement's greatest triumphs, the pointed arch and the buttress cast their long shadows across the width of Europe and beyond.

Nonetheless, in each country the Gothic Revival charted its own distinctive course. In England the movement was closely linked to the Anglican church and to the revival of certain traditional forces, tending toward a Catholic form of liturgy, within her. In France, on the other hand, the greatest Gothic Revival architect, Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, was virtually indifferent to religious sentiment. He gave the revival the characteristic Gallic concerns of reason and rationality, and helped ensure that Gothic architecture would be looked upon in France as an affair of rational construction.

In Germany the situation was more complicated. In both England and France the Gothic Revival had flourished against the background of a national state with a national religion—English Anglicanism or French Catholicism. Germany was no national state, its political map a fractured archipelago of tiny kingdoms and feudal principalities. Nor was there a national religion. Catholic states such as Bavaria and Austria contended with Protestant ones, most notably Prussia and Hanover. Religious and political division was the rule, affecting cultural and artistic life throughout Germany. This division not only left deep marks on the German Gothic Revival but actually acted to galvanize the movement and to define its doctrines. Unlike those of England and France, the German revival was rooted in the Catholic-Protestant conflict and was profoundly political in character. Fatefully, perhaps inevitably, it was where the tensions of the political and religious conflict were strongest—in the predominantly Catholic Rhineland, then a province of Prussia—that the various elements of the German Gothic Revival coalesced.