CONCLUSION

I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In England's green and pleasant land.

"Would to God that all the Lord's people were Prophets." Numbers 11:29
William Blake, "Preface" to Milton

While I have life left, I will protest against the caricatures of ancient temples which are daily erected. . . . (A. Welby Pugin, "A Reply to Observations")

A problem that one encounters in a book such as this one, dealing as it does almost exclusively with the theory of architecture and very little with actual buildings, is that the treatment is partial at best, misleadingly incomplete at worst. The problem, further, is made even more acute when the subject is architecture, where so many factors, unknown to the poet or painter or musician, interpose themselves between concept and realization, increasing still more the distance between theory and practice. This I cannot help; but to evaluate the Gothic Revival from a theoretical point of view comes closer, perhaps, to judging it on its own terms than any other single approach might do. "A perfect Judge will read each work of Wit/With the same spirit that its author writ," Pope advised critics; and though I make no claim to perfection, I do believe it a commendable goal toward which to strive.

I am thinking not so much of Pugin's well-known comment that his writing had been much more influential than his building when I assert a case for theory, although basis for an argument is there. What I have in mind rather is that to judge a man and his work by what he intended more than by what he accomplished, by, that is to say, his theory more than his practice, is the Romantic way of making judgments and is sharply different from both what went before and what came after. In the eighteenth century a work of art was judged according to both the intention and the execution. The critic should first assess the purpose of the artist and then determine with what success or failure the work of art realized that purpose. Thus, Pope
recommends in *An Essay on Criticism* that one first “regard the writer’s End,” and, having done so, “if the means be just, the conduct true,” one should account the writer successful and approve the effort. There is a good, sensible balance between plan and execution in this advice, as one would expect from the author and from the age. Nowadays, however, we have a tendency to discount the intention and consider only the accomplishment. In *Huis Clos* Garcin pathetically attempts to win the respect of Inez by maintaining that although he fled Brazil in a most cowardly way, he was not actually a coward because he really meant to continue the fight with a pacifist newspaper in Mexico. But Inez scornfully rejects his appeal with the existential argument that intentions count for nothing; only actions matter. The same type of reasoning has been applied to the evaluation of art in recent times, or at least to that of literature, where the doctrine of the intentional fallacy has led so many to evaluate a poem by and in itself with no regard for the writer’s intent.

The Romantic view, on the other hand, upsets the neoclassical balance in the other direction by elevating intention over accomplishment. Thus it is that Browning’s Rabbi Ben Ezra says, “Not on the vulgar mass/Called ‘work,’ must sentence pass,” but instead a person should be judged by his “Thoughts hardly to be packed/Into a narrow act . . . All I could never be.” Limitless aspirations that distinguish man from animal and that resist incorporation in material form tell in the final reckoning, not the imperfect and incomplete realization of these ideals.

If these propositions are true enough (and I fully realize that each is an oversimplification, but true enough, I say), then it seems obvious that to judge the proponents of the Gothic Revival according to their avowed goals as stated in their writings is to judge them on the prevailing terms of their own time. I do not mean to suggest that the other critical standards are without value or inappropriate, for they do yield insights, which, moreover, the Revival is quite capable of withstanding. If, for example, one measures the accomplishment against the dream as a neoclassicist would have one do, is there such a falling off
in the actual buildings as to make the Revival the colossal failure it has often been thought to be? It is true that Pugin himself, regarding his own work from this perspective, considered his life’s work a failure. “I have passed my life,” he lamented shortly before his death, “in thinking of fine things, studying fine things, designing fine things, and realising very poor ones.” It is also true that if one takes their primary goal to be the establishment of Gothic as the dominant architectural style for all buildings, ecclesiastical and secular, then one must conclude that they failed. And if, finally, one sees the Revival chiefly as a moral revolution, then again one is confronted with defeat. But, on the other hand, if one takes them at their word and views their primary aim as leading architecture out of a wilderness choked with the decaying remnants of classicism and overgrown with alien weeds of every imaginable stylistic extraction, then perhaps one finds that they did not fail so utterly after all. They sought a style distinctive of their own age, and they realized this end in buildings that, for all their historical echoes, are unmistakably Victorian. And who is to say that they did not make considerable contributions to the formation of modern architecture, the new style so much debated in their own time, just as surely as their contemporaries in other fields prepared for the arrival of the twentieth century?

If, secondly, one views the Revival from the modern perspective that attends little to goals in its concentration upon accomplishment, one is apt to find again more success than anticipated. In 1892, forty years after Pugin’s death, the apostate Goth Richard Norman Shaw visited St. Augustine’s, Ramsgate, the only church with which Pugin was wholly satisfied, and gave this account:

There is a charming little church here (Roman Catholic), built by the great Pugin, some 45 years ago, for himself. He designed and paid for the whole thing, and it is beautiful, so full of interest all through. Hideous stained glass, but in spite of that serious drawback, a most delightful and interesting work, and done so long ago. I am afraid we have not advanced much. Such a work makes one feel small, very small.

Today we have advanced much in some respects, although we are little less in sympathy with Pugin’s aims than was Shaw, yet
we too can look back with admiration and approval, even if little awesome remains to us, upon the finer achievements of the Revival. And what will be the assessment of the inevitable New Zealander, that haunting image of the future? We must suppose him now to have come from a distant planet and to use a camera or some other more sophisticated device for his archaeological fieldwork, and we may suppose as well that all Contrasts, True Principles, and issues of the Builder are lost to him either through destruction or through the unintelligibility of their yet undeciphered language so that he knows nothing of the buildings before him but what he sees. Might he not find as much of interest and of beauty in the river front of the Houses of Parliament as in the dome of St. Paul’s, or as in the elevation of the National Westminster Bank building?

In saying these things I do not mean to be unnecessarily apologetic about the Gothic Revival since it is no longer fashionable, at least among knowledgeable people, to decry it as a foolish and vain monument to tastelessness even though those who have no special interest in Victorian architecture do sometimes need to be reminded of its immediate and lasting importance. My point, rather, is that other methods than the one I have adopted are capable of revealing the importance of the Revival both then and now. I repeat, however, that to consider the theory of the Revival by itself, and in so doing to assume a perspective more basically in accord with the nineteenth-century outlook, discloses certain features of the Revival that seem to have remained obscure, or at least insufficiently appreciated, up till now. One such feature, which it has been the main purpose of this study to demonstrate, is the aesthetic motivation and character of the Revival. The proponents of neo-Gothic were undoubtedly influenced in their course by religious, political, and social causes; but in addition they were driven by aesthetic motives no less compelling, and at times even more forcibly so. They sought a reformation of the art of architecture, and they based this reformation upon artistic principles, principles that they shared with contemporary artists in other areas. If we but recall how often these men
referred to themselves as artists and to architecture as an art, we might be more aware of the importance of aesthetics to the movement.

A second feature has more to do with the men than with the movement, and this is that by concentrating on the writings of these architects one comes to see them as nothing less than prophets, a view that so far as I know is not commonly taken. Pugin, naturally, comes first to mind, and it seems hardly accidental that Robert Kerr should have eulogized him with an analogy to Elijah:

Take him [Pugin] with all his faults, he was one of those rare spirits—Nature could not afford to produce many of them—in whom the very power of intellect was its own destruction. The common record of such men was that they were eccentric, visionary, impracticable; but what cared they for common record? If they lived in turmoil, in storm and cloud, such was the destiny of the heroic: if they even perished in despair, it was genius passing away in a chariot of fire.

"Bring me my chariot of fire!" calls Blake in the preface to Milton, and who is more deserving the name of prophet than these two, poet and architect? Uncompromising, single-minded, utterly dedicated to the causes in which they believed, totally and fearlessly opposed to wrong as they saw it, convinced of their mission to build a new Jerusalem—they no less than Elijah were swept along in chariots of fire.

And if Pugin shares a prophetic role with Blake, then he and his followers in the movement—Scott, Street, Waterhouse, Butterfield, and others—might also be cast in the role so long reserved for writers like Carlyle, Ruskin, and Arnold, that of the Victorian Sage. At least it is true that these architects, like their literary contemporaries, delivered verdicts against the shallow materialism of their age while asserting the value of ideals. Here, for example, are two statements, the first by Pugin and the second by Arnold. Pugin concludes The True Principles with the exhortation, "Let then the Beautiful and the True be our watchword for future exertions in the overthrow of modern paltry taste and paganism, and the revival of Catholic art and dignity." Similarly, Arnold wrote of Oxford's battle against modern liberalism: "This our sentiment for beauty and sweet-
ness, our sentiment against hideousness and rawness, has been at the bottom of our attachment to so many beaten causes, of our opposition to so many triumphant movements” (Culture and Anarchy, chap. 1). It is tempting to carry the parallel to the end and claim ultimate victory for the Revival as Arnold did for the Oxford movement, but this is hardly possible.

Instead one must seek another analogy, which presents itself as the title of this book. “Cities built to music” is intended to mean primarily that Gothic Revival buildings were erected from aesthetic motives and according to artistic standards, but the title carries another meaning as well, which is that the Gothic Revival rose from the ideals of Pugin, Scott, and others, even as Camelot was built on ideals, the chivalric ideals of the Round Table. Tennyson once said that he wrote the Idylls to demonstrate the need for ideals in modern society, and one may say that the leaders of the Revival wrote and built with a similar motive.

If, then, a consideration of the idealistic intentions of these men leads us to regard them as prophets and sages, we should perhaps be no more entitled to fault them with failing to realize these intentions than to blame Blake for not building the new Jerusalem, to indict Arnold for his inability to make sweetness and light prevail, or to reprove Arthur for the collapse of Camelot. Their prophetic task it was to lead others to the truth as revealed to them, and if the end was never gained, the aspirations that guided them remain enduring inspirations to those who come after. Thus it is that although the cities envisioned by Gothic Revival architects were never built at all, the ideals upon which the cities were to be built—truth and beauty for the buildings themselves, integrity for the builders, and a love of good architecture for the society at large—retain a permanent value for all time.

For an ye heard a music, like enow
They are building still, seeing the city is built
To music, therefore never built at all,
And therefore built for ever.