render his grimace still more ridiculous. The number and variety of such grotesque faces, which we find scattered over the architectural decoration of our old ecclesiastical buildings, are so great that I will not attempt to give any more particular classification of them. All this church decoration was calculated especially to produce its effect upon the middle and lower classes, and mediaeval art was, perhaps more than anything else, suited to mediaeval society, for it belonged to the mass and not to the individual. The man who could enjoy a match at grinning through horse-collars, must have been charmed by the grotesque works of the mediaeval stone sculptor and wood carver; and we may add that these display, though often rather rude, a very high degree of skill in art, a great power of producing striking imagery.

These mediaeval artists loved also to produce horrible objects as well as laughable ones, though even in their horrors they were continually running into the grotesque. Among the adjuncts to these sculptured figures, we sometimes meet with instruments of pain, and very talented attempts to exhibit this on the features of the victims. The creed of the middle ages gave great scope for the indulgence of this taste in the infinitely varied terrors of purgatory and hell; and, not to speak of the more crude descriptions that are so common in mediaeval popular literature, the account to which these descriptions might be turned by the poet as well as the artist are well known to the reader of Dante. Coils of serpents and dragons, which were the most usual instruments in the tortures of the infernal regions, were always favourite objects in mediaeval ornamentation, whether sculptured or drawn, in the details of architectural decoration, or in the initial letters and margins of books. They are often combined in forming grotesque tracery with the bodies of animals or of human beings, and their movements are generally hostile to the latter. We have already seen, in previous chapters, examples of this use of serpents and dragons, dating from the earliest periods of mediaeval art; and it is perhaps the most common style of ornamentation in the buildings and illuminated manuscripts in our island from the earlier Saxon times to the thirteenth century. This ornamentation is sometimes strikingly bold and effective. In the cathedral of Wells there is a series of