V.—*Continuation of Observations on the Ancient Churches in the West of France : in a Letter to the* VISCOUNT MAHON, *President.* By JOHN HENRY PARKER, Esq. F.S.A.

Read Dec. 16, 1852; Jan. 13, 1853.

MY LORD,

In my last letter I endeavoured to give some account of the principal buildings in the ancient county of Poitou. The next place of any importance that I stopped at was Angoulême, which is on the direct road to Bordeaux; but, as I afterwards deviated from the direct route, and the church of Angoulême belongs to a very peculiar class, of which the type is the church of S. Front at PERIGUEUX, I think it will be more convenient for me to begin with that church.

This remarkable class of buildings, which may properly be called the Byzantine churches of France, I have already had occasion to mention several times, as many of the churches of Anjou and Poitou partake of this character, especially Fontevrault, which when perfect must have had the series of domes which are the distinguishing feature. In the district of Perigord there are not less than forty churches of this class, all copied, there is good reason to believe, from the church of S. Front. I propose, therefore, to give a short description of that building, and a notice of its history.

This very curious edifice is of thoroughly Byzantine character: the plan is a Greek cross of five squares each, vaulted by a lofty dome, which was originally open on the exterior to the weather and formed the only roof, but afterwards covered in by a plain roof of timber and tiles. A choir with an apse has been added at the east end, and a nave commenced at the west, but not finished, or else destroyed.

The work is extremely plain and massive, the piers very large and square, with small narrow arches pierced through them for the aisles. The domes are of stone, about eighteen inches thick; the upper surface is cut into steps, and has evidently been exposed to the weather, and after a time ceased to be water-tight. The first attempt to remedy this was by laying tiles upon the stone, fastened only with mortar; this not being found to answer, another roof was built over them, the exact form of which cannot now be ascertained. This was replaced by the present roof, which is modern, and is carried on side walls, not from the ground, but resting on part of the old work.

The choir and apse are in the style of the fourteenth century, but appear to have replaced an older structure.

There are apsidal chapels to the transepts, one of which has been restored ; the other has been built up. The interior of the church is remarkably plain. Pilasters are used against the flat walls only, not against the piers. Most of these pilasters are square, with quasi-Corinthian capitals of peculiar character, not at all like the work of the twelfth century. But those pilasters which are placed against the east wall of the transepts are half-rounds, with richer capitals, and with small shafts one over the other at the openings of the apsidal chapels. These features seem to indicate a re-building of this part, and, as the character of them is not later than the twelfth century, it seems to follow that the original parts must be earlier. Yet the main arches are all slightly pointed ; and this feature is clearly original, as the domes are carried on these pointed arches.

The tower stands at the west end of the present nave, and perhaps was the original termination of it ; but a continuation of the nave has been commenced, and a west doorway built of late Norman character. The tower is a very curious structure, evidently of two or three different periods, and the original part early. The exterior has a good deal of Roman look about it, one range of windows having pediments over them, with a Roman ornament. The lower part has square pilasters ; the upper part round ones. Several of the pilasters have flat bricks, resembling Roman tiles, introduced between the joints, and the window-arches have wide joints at intervals similar to tiles. The windows have all been partially filled up, and this filling-up work appears to be of the twelfth century. The tower is finished at the top by a cupola, carried on a series of small pillars or shafts, placed as closely together as possible ; but originally these shafts were only one-fourth of the present number, three new ones having been introduced between each pair of the original. The masonry of the tower is good and not wide-jointed ; the mortar has pounded brick and charcoal mixed with it, and this in the oldest parts.

All the main arches under the cupola are pointed ; the minor arches and window-heads are round. The stones appear to have been purposely arranged in such a manner as to give the effect of layers of tiles, but really formed by different-coloured stone.

The eastern part of the chancel is inclosed by high walls of the period of the Renaissance, apparently part of a plan for rebuilding the whole church, which was fortunately abandoned.^a

^a The beauty of the French ironwork has often been observed. Most Englishmen who have visited France at all have noticed the very rich doors of Nôtre Dame at Paris ; and, though such rich work as this is not

M. Felix de Verneilh,^a in his valuable work on the Byzantine Architecture of France, has shown so remarkable a resemblance of plan, dimensions, and details between the cathedral of S. Front and the church of S. Mark at Venice, that it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion at which he arrives—that they were either the work of the same architect, or that S. Front was built by workmen from Venice in exact imitation of S. Mark's. Almost the only difference is, that the arches of S. Front are pointed.

The recorded dates of the two buildings also agree remarkably with the hypothesis that they were in some degree the work of the same hands. The first stone of S. Mark's was laid in 977, that is of the new building, on an enlarged plan, after the great fire; and, though the ornamental work was carried on through the whole of the eleventh century, yet the main structure, the shell of the building, was finished in a few years, and it is with this shell only that we are concerned. The church of S. Front was commenced in 984 by Bishop Frotaire, and finished about 1047, in which year it was dedicated by Archbishop Aymon.

There is no distinct record of any Greek or Venetian colony at Perigueux, but it is well known that there was such a colony at Limoges in the tenth and eleventh centuries, who carried on a large trade, receiving the productions of the East from Venice by way of Marseilles, and distributing them extensively in the north of France and in England. In the beginning of the eleventh century also two Greek

often met with anywhere, yet the generality of French churches or houses of the middle ages have ironwork worthy of attention. The singular variety and beauty of their nail-heads especially attract English eyes, as something to which we are not accustomed at home. The specimen here given from the church of S. Front, is a specimen of a form not uncommon in France.

^a The beautiful and accurate engravings with which M. Verneilh's work is illustrated render it quite unnecessary to give any engravings here of S. Front at Perigueux.

monks resided for a considerable period at Angoulême, and attended the second Council of Limoges in 1031. By a singular coincidence also, in 1847 twelve copper coins were found in a burial-ground at Perigueux, of the Greek Emperor John Zimisces, who reigned from 962 to 975, so that these coins are precisely those which would have been in circulation at the time that the Greek workmen are supposed to have been at Perigueux.

The question still remains whether the church has been subsequently rebuilt or not. A great fire is recorded to have taken place in 1120, in which the monastery of S. Front was burnt, and many persons lost their lives; but M. de Verneilh considers that the church, from its peculiarly massive character,^a could not be destroyed, though it might be injured by fire, and that it bears evident marks of this injury and the subsequent repairs, especially the tower, which may have been most exposed to the fire. He also shows, by documentary evidence, that some of the country churches, which are evidently copied from S. Front, were built in the early part of the eleventh century, and in these the pointed arch is used equally with S. Front. It appears, therefore, more probable that the original structure was preserved and repaired than that all these churches should have been rebuilt a century after their foundation; neither is the character of S. Front at all what we should expect to find after 1120: its very remarkable and almost unique features seem to agree much better with the earlier period. M. de Verneilh has shown that the lower part of the tower and some other work joining on to it westward of the present church belong to a still older church, supposed to be of the sixth century; and two small chapels which form part of the work are said to be the shrines of the martyrs S. Severin and S. Aignan. I cannot say much from my own observation on this part of the subject. When I was at Perigueux I had not the pleasure of being acquainted with M. de Verneilh, and his work had not then appeared; but I consider him a very careful observer, and not one who arrives hastily at a conclusion; and, without knowing anything of the supposed history of the building, I observed the mixture of debased Roman work in it, very similar to that of S. John at Poitiers. The lower part of the tower particularly struck me by its curious plan and details, and my notes agree very well with M. de Verneilh's plan and description.

In the lower town of Perigueux, called the City, because this was the Roman city, is another church of Byzantine character, dedicated to S. STEPHEN. This was

^a This extremely massive character may, however, frequently be observed in churches of the early part of the twelfth century, especially when rebuilt after a great fire or a fall of the tower, as at Winchester. The monks appear to have been determined that the church should not again be destroyed in the same manner, and it is often curious to observe the mass of materials they have piled together to make sure of this object.

originally the cathedral, though very inferior to the great monastic church of S. Front, which has now succeeded to it in that dignity ; but this is only a modern arrangement. S. Stephen's was the cathedral down to a recent period : it is, however, evidently of later work than S. Front, and copied from it.

This church consists of two square bays only, each with its dome, and what renders it valuable is, that these domes, with their casing of tiles, are still its only covering ; they still serve both for vaults and roofs. The two bays are not of the same age, one is considerably older than the other ; one appears to be of the eleventh century, the other of the twelfth. The domes, instead of being solid, as at S. Front, are double, with a space left between the inner and outer shell. This arrangement has probably preserved them, and enables them to be still used as roofs. It is probable that the inconvenience of the water penetrating through the single layer of stone at S. Front was perceived at an early period, and the evil guarded against here, by making it double. The church was originally much larger, and had a tower similar to that of S. Front, but was nearly destroyed by the Protestants, in the wars of religion, and these two bays are all that remain of it. This church is said to have been begun in 1013, and finished, so far as to be consecrated on the same day with S. Front in 1047.

The eastern bay is of a much lighter and later style than the other ; the arches carrying the dome are comparatively slender, pointed, and the edges recessed. The windows and arcades are round-headed, with shafts and ornaments of rather late Norman character. The western bay is much earlier and more massive, the arches slightly pointed, but the whole of the work very plain, and very like to S. Front. The domes are built of rather larger stones than is usual for vaulting, and on the top of each dome is a small sort of temple with a cupola. The remains of a third bay westward shew it to have been of rather smaller dimensions and quite as early character as the second. In the second bay is a good tomb of late Norman work, in the form of a doorway, richly ornamented, and with a long inscription giving the date of 1169, to the memory of John of Asside. A facsimile of this inscription has been engraved by Willemin in his "*Monumens Français.*" The style of this tomb is altogether that of Poitou, of which country the bishop was a native.^a

In the eastern bay, incised on the south wall, is a very curious perpetual calendar for finding Easter, and the other moveable festivals. This has been engraved by

^a Of this tomb an engraving is here given, with so much of the inscription as is of importance for our object, the remainder consisting only of a prayer for the soul of the departed. The ornaments of this dated example are very valuable for comparison with others. They agree with what we should expect to find in England at the same date, being of very late Norman, almost of Transitional, character.

Tomb of John of Asside in the old Cathedral of Perigueux, A.D. 1160.

M. de Caumont, but very badly, and I obtained a tolerably careful rubbing of it. This remarkable inscription has also been described and commented on by Scaliger, the Abbé Lebœuf, and by M. Taillefer.

In the outskirts of the lower town, standing in a vineyard, is a large and lofty round tower of Roman work. A breach has been made on one side, where apparently was the original entrance; the rest of the wall is perfect, and about a hundred feet high. It is of rubble, faced with small Roman ashlar, on both sides. Various fragments of pillars, capitals, and other details, have been found and placed in the tower. The French antiquaries are not agreed as to the use of this tower. The tradition of the country is, that it was a tomb, and it appears so exactly to agree with the family burying places in the neighbourhood of Rome, as shown in Mr. Gally Knight's work, that this seems to me the most probable destination. But my friend M. le Verneilh, who has studied the matter much more carefully than I had the opportunity of doing, says he cannot agree with this explanation.

At a short distance from this are some remains of the fortifi-

cation of the lower town, or the City as it is called. The walls, for some feet above the ground, are Roman, the superstructure partly of the twelfth century, and another part of the fifteenth, with a picturesque tower of Flamboyant work built of very small stones, probably the Roman ashlar facing used up again.

In the town of Perigueux there are several medieval houses. One in the Rue des Farges is a valuable specimen of the style of the twelfth century, the upper part being nearly perfect, with an arcade or range of windows, and doorways at each end a little below the level of the windows, and which must have opened to an external stair or ladder. These windows are ornamented with the billet and zigzag. The lower story has a series of pointed arches walled up.

I will now return to my actual route, from which I have digressed in order to describe Perigueux, on account of its greater importance. After leaving S. Savin, with which I concluded my last letter, the next place of any interest is MONTMORILLION, where there is a small Transitional church, with a pointed barrel vault, the shafts having capitals with late foliage. The doorway is singular, being pointed and deeply recessed, with shafts having sculptured capitals without any abacus. There is also a curious range of sculpture in sunk panels just under the corbel table, with small figures of the twelfth century, but mutilated.

The octagonal chapel or chapter-house (?) is of a Transitional character, with a good corbel table and pointed arches recessed in the outside of the wall. I was not able to get inside of it; but was informed that it has a crypt, and that the vault of the upper chamber is carried on a central shaft. This gives the idea of a chapter-house, a use to which it is again applied. On one side of the octagon is a bell-turret for two bells.

LUSSAC LES CHATEAUX has a plain small church of Transitional character, thoroughly modernized in the interior, and with a modern tower, but with two good doorways, and some rich sculpture in the capitals, and bases with the foot ornaments. The west window is a good specimen of the Transitional work of this district, with a pointed arch, and shafts with capitals of foliage.

The ruins of the two castles from which it derives its name are more picturesque than valuable for any architectural character. The remains of the bridge across a ravine and over a small river, which served to connect these two castles, is curious and interesting, both for its position and historical associations, as being the scene of a battle between a party of French and English, in which Sir John Chandos was killed, owing chiefly to the nature of the ground, which is high and rocky on each side of the river. This is graphically described by Froissart in his Chronicle.

CHURCH OF ST. MAURICE NEAR GENAY.

Published by the Society of Antiquaries, April 23, 1853.

The remains of the bridge now consist of four plain square towers rising out of the water, and another at each end, forming the piers of the bridge. As there are no remains of arches, the bridge itself was probably of wood.

The castle of GENÇAY is finely situated, and extremely picturesque from its numerous round towers and singular plan, which is triangular. It is of the thirteenth century. The lower rooms in the towers have domical vaults, with ribs meeting in a central boss. The staircase is outside of the main wall of the castle, but is itself protected by another external wall. There are remains of fire-places and chimneys in the upper rooms.

The church of Notre-Dame at Gençay is a small plain structure of the thirteenth century, with a good doorway of that period, the shafts of which have capitals of the stiff-leaf foliage.

The church of S. MAURICE, near Gençay (Plate I.), is a fine rich example of Romanesque work; the plan cruciform, with short transepts, and octagonal apses to

Plan of the Church of St. Maurice.

the choir, transepts, and chapels; the nave has aisles, but there are none round the choir. The apses are round within, though polygonal without, and have shafts in the angles, with good corbel tables and arcades between, and arches sunk in the wall

below. The south side, which is not exposed to view, is much plainer than the north side. It has a central tower, square, with the angles rounded off, within which is a domical vault, with ribs united in the centre. The other vaults are of the pointed barrel shape, and the apses have the semi-dome vaults. The arches are pointed. The capitals are richly sculptured, in designs of the same early character as is general in Poitou, but the work evidently late; the bases also are ornamented, and there are some good rich strings. The doorway is very wide and low, with short shafts, having large capitals sculptured, and very thick abacus, also enriched. The corbel-table is also richly carved. The exterior of the nave is plain. Altogether it is a good example of rather early Transitional work.

The church of Nôtre Dame at CIVRAY is another fine example of Romanesque work, with a very rich front, resembling that of Nôtre Dame at Poitiers. The plan is cruciform, with aisles to the nave, choir, and apse, and apsidal chapels to the transepts. The central tower is square below, octagonal above, with a domical vault, the arches on which it is carried are slightly pointed. The interior of the church is plain, but one capital has a rich group of small figures, apparently representing a legend; the other capitals have foliage only. All the other vaults are of the pointed barrel-form; the arches are low, slightly pointed, on massive square piers, with shafts attached. The windows are small and round-headed, with arches over them recessed in the wall. The buttresses, both to the west front and to the tower, are round. The arrangement of the furniture struck me as singular; the choir of the monks being entirely in the nave, with a separate railing east and west, and space for the congregation all round it, including the space under the tower. The altar stands in the apse with another railing, so that part of the congregation are between the singers and the altar. I afterwards found other examples of this arrangement, and am told it is usual in Spain. In the west front there is an orna-

Norman Ornaments from the Church of Civray.

ment resembling the tooth ornament, but with eight leaves instead of four; and several other very good Norman ornaments, amongst which occurs the ball-flower, exactly of the same form as afterwards used so commonly in England in the time of Edward I. and II., and sometimes supposed to represent the pomegranate, in compliment to queen Eleanor of Castile. This ornament is occasionally to be found in the west of France, in work of the latter half of the twelfth century, as in the present instance.

The church of RUFFEC has another remarkably good and rich west front of late Romanesque work, filled with sculpture, with foliage and figures in high relief, but unfortunately much mutilated. The doorways have been altered in the beginning of the period of the Renaissance, and nearly the whole of the interior has been almost rebuilt at the same time; the same rich style of ornament occurs here as at Civray. I have selected for engraving a very beautiful variety of the star ornament, which seems to have been one of the steps by which the tooth ornament was arrived at.

Norman Ornament from the Church of Ruffec.

The cathedral of ANGOULEME (Plate II.) is a very remarkable and striking building, and a good specimen of the Byzantine style in France. The plan is a Latin cross, with a long nave, and very short transepts. The nave is of three square bays, without aisles, vaulted by their domes; the westernmost of rather plainer and earlier character than the others. The central compartment is also vaulted by a dome, considerably more lofty than the others; the form of which is not round, but a kind of irregular octagon, like some of the German churches on the Rhine; it is carried on four plain arches, which are wide, slightly pointed, and recessed; the lower part of the dome forms a kind of lantern, with small windows and arcades.* The piers are massive and square, with shafts attached, which have capitals of rather late-looking foliage, a good deal under-cut, and of the character rather of the south

* These are very irregular, as represented in the annexed engraving.

of France than of the north. The choir has aisles of Flamboyant work, and its original character is destroyed. At the end of each transept was originally a large square tower; the northern one remains, the southern one has been destroyed, except the lower part of it, which is turned into a vestry. The west front is very rich, filled with sculpture representing the Last Judgment, in the style of Nôtre Dame at Poitiers: the gable has been destroyed, and the corner turrets altered.

This church appears to be an imitation of S. Front at Perigueux, and its plan and dimensions are almost identical with Fontevrault. It is recorded to have been rebuilt, from the first stone, by bishop Gerard, who was elected in 1101, and occupied the see thirty-five years. Notwithstanding this positive assertion of the monkish historian, M. Verneilh considers that the western bay and some other portions belong to the previous edifice, which is also recorded to have been built about a century earlier. There is certainly some difference of style; but it appeared to me more likely that the richer parts are of later date, and the earliest parts are the work of Gerard. These rich fronts of Romanesque work, of which we have so many in this part of France, seem to be always late work, hardly earlier than the middle of the twelfth century.

The chapel of the Cordeliers, now of the hospital of Angoulême, is of the early French style of the thirteenth century, with a good vault, and vaulting shafts, and long, narrow, lancet windows. The end window is Flamboyant, of the form of a spherical triangle. On the south side stands a small octagonal tower, the lower part of which is of Romanesque work; the upper part, later, with a crocketed spire.

The church of COGNAC has originally been very similar to that of Angoulême, both in style and in dimensions; but it has been much altered at several different periods. It was originally vaulted by a series of domes, like the other Byzantine churches in this part of France; but these have almost disappeared, and the interior is now chiefly modern work, in the Flamboyant style, well executed. The work was unfinished when I was there in 1850. The plan is cruciform, with the tower on the west side of the north transept. This tower is now the most remarkable feature in the building, and is very curious: in plan, it is not square, and the two wider arches are round, the narrower ones pointed; they are all remarkably lofty, higher than the nave of the church, to which this tower is evidently an addition. The pillars which carry these arches are not attached to the walls, but stand clear of them. The tower is surmounted by a small dome, or cupola vault, over which another story has been added in the fourteenth century, or later: the style is Transition

G. Bouet del.

J.H. Le Roux sc.

CATHEDRAL OF ANGOULÊME.

Published by the Society of Antiquaries, April 23, 1853.

Norman, with some rich ornaments.^a A window of the church, which is blocked up by this tower, is also of Transition Norman character ; at least it has a pointed arch, and ornaments resembling the tooth ornament ; yet the tower is evidently considerably later. The Transitional style would appear to have continued for a long period in this part of France. The west front of the church is of the same rich character, filled with sculpture, as many others that have been mentioned : most of the figures are mutilated ; the foliage is boldly undercut, which generally indicates a late date, but perhaps not so late here as it would do further north. A round Flamboyant window has been introduced in the west gable.

TOURIERS is a village church of the twelfth century, but very plain, and of no particular interest ; nevertheless, there is a remarkable ornament on a moulding of

^a The cornice and capitals represented in the annexed woodcut afford a good specimen of the foliage and

Cornice and Capitals in the Church of Cognac.

mouldings usual in the Transition Norman work of this part of France. There is a junction in this work at this point, and the two capitals are not exactly of the same age, the one belonging to the work of the church, the other of the tower ; but the difference of date is probably not many years, and they are made to harmonize remarkably well, though a difference in the mouldings, as well as the foliage, may be observed on close examination.

Norman Ornament from the Church of Touriers.

the doorway which is very uncommon, if not unique, though it resembles what is called the scallop ornament in England.

The town of SAINTES contains several fine and interesting churches. The cathedral is of two periods: the original parts belong to a Byzantine church of the twelfth century, of which the domes remain on the transepts. It is a large cruciform church with apse, aisles, and chapels—the exterior altogether of the Flamboyant style of the fifteenth century; but the work of rebuilding or altering was never completed. The buttresses and pinnacles are built at the sides, but the clerestory, which these were to have supported, has never been built. The tower is a very fine one, of the Flamboyant style, remarkably massive and grand in its effect; the lower part square, the upper part octagonal, with flying buttresses and numerous pinnacles on every projecting point; altogether it is, perhaps, one of the finest towers of this style in France. There is an Early French cloister, with a good vault, carried partly on corbels and partly on shafts.

St. Pallais is a small cruciform church without aisles, of Transitional character; the choir is later than the nave, and is of the Early French style, as are the vaults; the west doorway is of plain Transitional work, with shafts, which have very singular bases, resembling in form those of the English Perpendicular style.

Near this church is another, of which I could not learn the name, which is desecrated and turned into stables for the cavalry barracks. It is in the Romanesque style, with a fine central tower, and a very rich doorway at the west end, the sculpture of which is free and appears late in the style.

St. Eutrope consists of the choir only of a fine Romanesque church, of which the nave has been destroyed; under the choir is a very fine crypt, extending under the whole choir, with its aisles and the transepts. It has some remarkable features, especially the stilted arches. The choir has a Flamboyant apse, but the rest of the work is original, and the exterior is very good and uncommon, having a series of arches over the windows carried on round pillars instead of buttresses. The apsidal chapel is quite round, like the base of a round tower, and covered with arcades. The south transept remains and forms the basement of a fine Flamboyant tower with a crocketed spire. At a short distance from the church, in the outskirts of the town, are the remains of a large Roman amphitheatre.

I shall be happy to continue these notes on French Architecture at any time that may be convenient to the Society, and I have some hundreds of Mr. Bouet's drawings to illustrate them.

I remain, my Lord,

Your Lordship's obliged and obedient Servant,

J. H. PARKER.