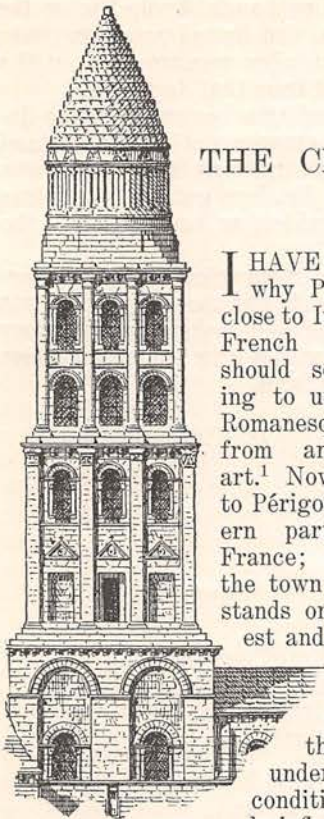


## THE CHURCHES OF PÉRIGUEUX AND ANGOULÈME.



TOWER OF ST. FRONT,  
PÉRIGUEUX.

I HAVE tried to show why Provence, lying close to Italy, is the first French province one should see when trying to understand how Romanesque developed from ancient Roman art.<sup>1</sup> Now we must turn to Périgord, in the western part of central France; for here, in the town of Périgueux, stands one of the oldest and most remarkable of all French churches—one that was built under peculiar local conditions, but strongly influenced the subsequent course of architecture far beyond the boundaries of its own town and province.

### I.

DURING the fifth century the semi-civilized Visigoths spread themselves over those Gallic lands which the Romans called Aquitania, established a splendid court at Toulouse, and extended their dominion into Spain. But when Clovis, early in the sixth century, drove them out of the greater part of Aquitania, his Franks held their new domain merely by force of arms. They did not settle upon it and make themselves at home as they had done in the regions north of the Loire, and therefore the Romanized Gallic blood of its people was much less strongly tinged by barbarian strains.

The consequences of this fact have never been outlived; even to-day the southern differs from the northern Frenchman in character and temperament, in aspect, manner, aptitudes, and tastes. But for centuries the racial difference meant actual antagonisms

of the keenest sort. All the provinces south of the Loire resisted the scepter of the Frankish kings, and later of the French kings, with peculiar persistence and passion, and religious and social antipathies aided political rivalries to perpetuate warfare even as late as the seventeenth century. The southerners spoke the *langue d'oc*, which we now call Provençal, while the northerners spoke the *langue d'oïl*, which we call French; and southern types of medieval art were distinctive in the strength and the long persistence of the Byzantine, as well as of the classic, impress which they had received at their birth.

Of course Charlemagne thoroughly possessed Aquitaine, as he did almost all other parts of western Europe. But the hold of his descendants upon it soon waxed weak; the counts whom he had everywhere set as governors in his towns quickly made their power hereditary in Périgueux; and local defiance of northern authority grew still more bold when, late in the tenth century, the Capetian dynasty succeeded the Carolingian. Then, in Périgord, public acts were dated, «In the reign of God until there shall be a king»; and a count of Périgueux is the hero of an oft-told tale which, whether literally veracious or not, truthfully typifies the temper of the time. When Hugh Capet demanded his surrender, saying, «Who made you a count?» this bold rebel replied, «Who made you a king?»

The railroad between Toulouse and Périgueux is a cross-country route unknown to the tourist, and speedy progress is the last thing it considers. But just for these reasons it is a delightful road to travel. It runs through districts beautiful with those bold rock formations and those floods of cloudless light and opalescent color which the South so confidently offers in compensation for the richer verdure of the North. In many parts the contours of the landscape are picturesquely broken, and I remember no journey which shows a more persistent panorama of oddly attractive architectural bits. Large towns are very few, but villages whose names one never heard before are many. Each looks as though neither man nor thing of modern

<sup>1</sup> See «The Churches of Provence,» in THE CENTURY for November, 1894.



make could ever have entered it. All are accentuated by quaintly effective ruined walls, feudal castles, or time-worn churches, and many cling to high points of cliff as though they were details from Albert Dürer's backgrounds. When I tried, from the train, to note down the delightful diversities of the ubiquitous little towers, I soon abandoned the attempt—they were so numerous and so oddly diverse. And, as a whole, it seemed an entrancing country for a pedestrian tour, offering the full flavor of an ancient, an untraveled, and an untouched land, with something certainly curious and probably charming to enliven each successive hour.

At the end of such a journey Périgueux itself is rather disappointing. It is a small town and, for France, a dull one, and commonplace-looking despite its station on hilly ground beside the river Isle, and despite its pretty gardens and riverside promenades, its Roman ruins, and its early medieval churches. The hills are not imposing, the ruins are very badly ruined, and the churches make little showing in a general view; medieval and Renaissance structures of other sorts—military, civic, or domestic—seem few and tame after the riches of Provençal places, and the modern architect has seldom been ambitious.

But we know that every town in France was picturesque in medieval days, while religious enthusiasm joined to unceasing warfare kept it always lively. And we may believe that Périgueux was an attractive place even in Renaissance days, after it had drunk its share of the bitter cup on which the west of France was nourished during the long struggle between the Capetian monarchs and their English vassals, and the still more bitter one which the whole land imbibed during the Hundred Years' War, when these vassals were trying to make themselves the actual kings of France. We may believe this, for Montaigne was a gentleman of taste, and unlikely to be swayed by provincial prejudice; and he has a monument in Périgueux which bears these quoted words: «*M'aïmerois à l'aventure mieulx deuxiesme ou troisieme à Périgueux que premier à Paris.*»

To-day, however, Périgueux is preëminent in but a small and carnal way. Its most noted natural product is the truffle, and its finest works of art are its truffled *pâtés*.

## II.

CLOSE by Périgueux to the southward are some scant remains of the Gallic fortress of pre-Roman days. The part of the town which

is called the Cité stands on the site of the Roman Vesuna, and across the river from this is the Bourg Puy-de-Saint-Front, which grew up around an oratory built in the sixth century over the tomb of the first bringer of the Christian gospel. These two parts of Périgueux long existed as separate burghs, each with its own fortifications; they were not united until the year 1269.

A monastic house was soon established in connection with the oratory of St. Front, and, perhaps before the close of the sixth century, a basilican church was built above three underground chapels which still exist. Of this Early Christian church (or, as the French would say, this Latin church) enough likewise exists to tell us pretty clearly what it was. Its nave was five bays in length and was covered by an open wooden ceiling, while the lower, narrower aisles were vaulted with stone. The façade, now much mutilated and partly concealed by other structures, was crowned by a little pilastered arcade, above which rose a crude version of the classic pediment, adorned with pilasters, with small rude figures, and with inlays in coarse reticulated patterns—barbaric imitations of Roman mosaic work. In front of the façade stood a covered porch, and this must have been one of the very earliest of those true porches which, because they gave fuller protection from the weather, or because they were more easily built when the art of shaping columns had been forgotten, soon replaced the open portico of the basilica, and were gradually developed into the beautiful structures that tempted Romanesque and Gothic sculptors to reveal the richest capabilities of their chisels. This covered porch at Périgueux was built several centuries before the very classical one which we saw at Avignon; yet it must have been quite Romanesque in expression, for it was entered through a round-arched arcade.

Three bays of the nave to which it gave admittance (greatly altered, of course) now form a sort of ante-church, and beyond them stands the later church for whose special sake the traveler visits Périgueux. Nothing could be more unlike its Early Christian predecessor than this church of St. Front, and nothing more unlike the churches of its own date in other parts of France. The basilican plan is frankly and wholly abandoned. In plan, and consequently in design, St. Front is a Byzantine church, although, most probably, it was begun before the year 1000—some years before the classicizing porch at Avignon, and more than a century before those Provençal portals which proclaim Byzantine

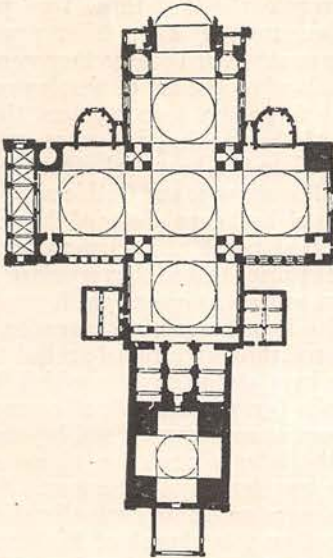


influence. St. Front at Périgueux lacks the rich decoration of St. Mark's in Venice, its broad façade and stately doorways, and its interior colonnades; yet if these two famous churches are not actually twins, nevertheless they are «two sisters of one race,» and their birth-dates fell very close together.

### III.

TRIUMPHANT Rome spread her monuments over the East as over the West, and they formed the basis of Byzantine as of Romanesque art. Like the Romanesque builder, the Byzantine builder took arch and pier and column, rejecting the entablature, and developed a pure system of arched construction in place of the Roman mixture of the arched and trabeated systems. But he did not accept the basilican ground-plan, and he did perpetuate the dome, neglected and forgotten in the West.

This was undoubtedly because he labored and experimented first in Syria, for the dome was indigenous on Asian soil; ages before the time of the Romans the Assyrians had used it with their barrel-vaults. But the main triumph of the Byzantine builder was an innovation of his own: it was the discovery



PLAN OF THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. FRONT, PÉRIGUEUX.

Within its walls, the diameter of St. Front, exclusive of the remains of the Early Christian church, is 176 feet, and the height of its central dome is 84 feet.

of more plastic ways of building domical ceilings. The Romans had raised these arched and circular ceilings only upon circular sub-structures; but now they were fitted to sub-structures of other shapes by throwing their

weight upon special points of support, the transition from the square or octagon below to the circle above being made by means of pendentives.<sup>1</sup> Basilican churches occur in Syria, and in some of them, where the aisles are as lofty as the nave, we may probably read the origin of those very tall aisles which, as we have seen, were characteristic of Provençal Romanesque. But square ground-plans, or cruciform plans with arms of equal or of nearly equal length, became the rule in the East; the central dome was often flanked by smaller ones, or, as at St. Sophia in Constantinople, by semi-domes; and of course a different scheme of design for the walls of the church was thus required.

But other than modified Roman elements entered into the composition of Byzantine architecture. Large parts of Asia Minor had been Greek in very early times, and, much later, the successors of Alexander Hellenized Syria. Here Roman work was itself affected by Greek traditions, and likewise by that indigenous art which we call Phœnician and which had largely devoted itself to working in metals; and the Early Christian style still more clearly took the impress of these antecedent arts, while distinctly Oriental influences also touched it. New methods and types of decoration were evolved. Late Roman profiles and carvings had been in very high relief, but soft and lax in execution; now they were very much flattened (the carvings often actually in intaglio), but were wrought with a sharp, crisp touch; and their flatness and their sharpness alike recalled the ideals of the metal-worker. Greek inventiveness showed in new forms for bases and capitals, Greek taste in their grace and beauty. Foliage was freely designed after Greek acanthus types, or with vine-leaves and grape-bunches that were characteristically Phœnician. Interlacing patterns of straight and circular lines were borrowed from the Orient, and were mixed with the new symbols and monograms of Christianity. The Oriental love for color and richness spoke through the decorative use of varied marbles, of metals, of gildings, and of inlays, and through the more sumptuous aspect given the mosaic pictures borrowed from the Romans. Painting was also largely employed; but—probably owing to the influence of Hebrew prejudice—figure-sculpture was never much in favor

<sup>1</sup> Pendentives are the curving fields of wall which, filling the spaces between the supporting arches, spread and unite above in a continuous wall of the shape desired for the base of the dome. They are clearly shown in our picture of the interior of St. Front.





INTERIOR OF THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. FRONT, PÉRIGUEUX.

with the Eastern Church, and eventually it wholly disappeared before the cry of idolatry raised by the famous sect called the Iconoclasts.

Rome and the Orient thus furnished the basis for Byzantine art, but Greek intelligence developed its constructional elements, the Greek sense for balance, harmony, and grace blended its diverse decorative motives, and to Greek skill of hand was due their exquisite execution. When we want to characterize early Byzantine work we must call it Greco-Roman work of a novel kind. Nor should we forget that the crowning monu-

ment of this branch of architecture, the Church of the Holy Wisdom in Constantinople, was built by Greek architects of Syrian birth.

Of course the magnificence compassed in St. Sophia was not developed all at once. Many of the churches, chapels, and monasteries built in Syria between the third and the seventh century, and still existing in great numbers, are relatively simple and plain; and Oriental features are not conspicuous until we approach Constantinople, where all the products of all the East were gathered, and where her artists crowded to



a court much more Oriental than Greek or Roman in spirit and in customs. Yet without a knowledge of the early churches of Syria it would be impossible to understand how St. Sophia, built in the sixth century, came to differ so entirely—in plan, form, feature, and decoration—from the basilican churches which Constantine, in his newer as in his older capital, had erected two centuries before. And until we compare the sureness in design and the technical skill these Asiatic works display with the awkwardness, the roughness, the crudeness of the Early Christian buildings of the West, we cannot realize the value of an unbroken heritage of Hellenic knowledge and taste.

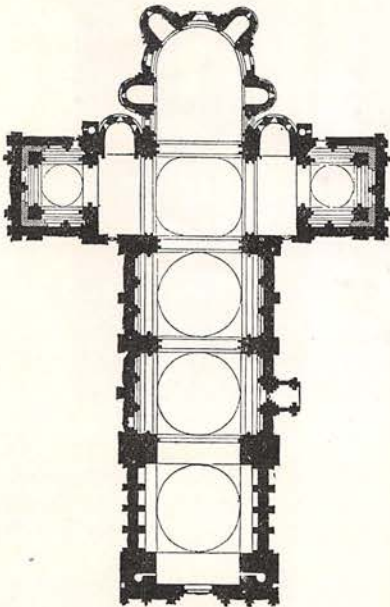
Not only hundreds of admirable Syrian churches, but St. Sophia itself, had been completed before the Early Christian basilica at Périgueux was begun. When we think what this must have been, with its wooden ceiling and scant, barbaric attempts at ornament, and what St. Sophia is, with the most beautiful dome that has ever yet been constructed, and a richness of finely devised and perfectly wrought adornment that has never yet been equaled, can we marvel that any

venna at Aix-la-Chapelle, and sedulously encouraged the immigration of Byzantine artists? Or is it surprising that, in the tenth century, the Venetians, perpetually in commercial contact with every Eastern port, imitated a Constantinopolitan church amid their own lagoons? Between the sixth and the eleventh century Western art—Romanesque art—was not even sure what it wanted to try to do, while in the sixth century Eastern art—Byzantine art—had already conceived and perfected some of the most marvelous monuments of human intelligence and taste.

## IV.

BEFORE crusading times the Venetians monopolized the carrying-trade between East and West, and it is easy to see how the small and precious wares of which their cargoes chiefly consisted—stuffs and jewels, ivory, metal, and wooden carvings, and ecclesiastical ornaments—gave lessons in decorative design even to the far north of Europe. But how, in the time of Hugh Capet, a century before the first crusade, was the remote inland city of Périgueux brought into such relationship with Eastern art that it could actually build a great church after a Byzantine model?

Probably through these same Venetian agencies. The Norman pirate was then abroad, and, with a valuable cargo, no one dared to force a passage through the Pillars of Hercules and the Biscayan Gulf. So the Venetians landed their wares at the ports of Provence, and thence carried them across country to Limoges, where, in the latter part of the tenth century, they established a colony with an abbey-church of their own. From Limoges their goods were distributed, again by land, or by sea from the ports of Nantes and Rochelle, through the British Islands and the northern parts of the Continent. Périgueux lay on the Venetian track, southward some sixty miles from Limoges. A Venetian or a Byzantine architect turned trader for the nonce, or a monkish architect from Périgord itself who had visited Venice or Constantinople under the traders' wing—who can say which it was that conceived the wish to build a Byzantine church so far to the westward of Byzantine lands, or directed its designing? We cannot even be sure whether St. Front was copied from St. Mark's, or directly from an Eastern structure. But the former theory is usually held, and the years between 984 and 1047, quickly following the years which saw the building of St.



PLAN OF THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. PETER, ANGOULÊME.

The length of St. Peter's, outside the walls, is 206 feet, and its breadth across the transept 165 feet.

kind or degree of contact with Byzantine art deeply impressed Western eyes and often guided Western hands? Can we wonder that the churches of Constantinople were copied at Ravenna, or that Charlemagne copied Ra-





FAÇADE OF THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. PETER, ANGOULÊME.

Mark's, are usually named as those which witnessed the building of St. Front.

Compare the plan of St. Front on page 920 and Mr. Pennell's sketch of its interior with a plan and a picture of St. Mark's, and you will see how similar they are, and how utterly they differ from any Western type of church. They are characteristically Byzantine, alike in the equal length of their four arms and in the domical character of their ceilings. But, on the other hand, they differ from all other

Byzantine churches in the position and the massiveness of their four great piers, in the fashioning of these piers into hollowed spaces, and in the enormous size of the arches they bear as supports for the five low domes. On the strength of a description by Procopius it is believed that St. Mark's was imitated from a peculiar Byzantine building, the Church of the Apostles in Constantinople, long ago destroyed. Even if we did not know of any close connection between Venice and Périgord, it



would be easier to believe that the Venetian copy of this church was recopied in the farther West than that two Western architects should have chanced to choose the same exceptional Eastern structure as their model. Moreover, St. Front and St. Mark's are almost precisely alike in their dimensions, while the recorded importance of the Church of the Apostles, in a city of magnificent temples, seems to imply that it was a good deal larger.

When the original construction of St. Front is understood, one fact seems very plainly proved: whoever designed the church, it was actually built by local, provincial hands. Its pendentives were constructed in a fashion which showed that the geometrical reasons for Byzantine expedients had not been clearly understood. The colonnades which, running from pier to pier, form aisles in St. Mark's, were replaced by tall arcades attached to the walls—features less difficult to construct and more suitable to the plain materials here employed; the decorative details were largely local—that is, Gallo-Roman—in character; and the huge pier-arches were slightly pointed.

Of course in St. Mark's, as in all Eastern churches, only round arches were employed. But we have seen that the nave-vaults of Provençal churches were given a pointed shape as early as the year 1100, although the Provençal style as such remained thoroughly Romanesque. At Périgueux the case was similar, and the reason for it was the same. Here again the use of the pointed arch was «a method of construction rather than an architectural characteristic.» It merely meant that, a century before Provençal architects learned the lesson, this far Western builder knew that, on a large scale and by inexperienced hands, a broken curve might more easily be managed than a semi-circular one.

The exterior of St. Front differed more from St. Mark's than the interior. Its domes appeared as cupolas, the central one supporting a lantern, and the others large ornaments shaped like pine-cones such as the Romans had frequently employed. The Greek cross ground-plan was not confused by the addition of a wide façade. The circles of windows at the base of the domes which so mysteriously illumine St. Mark's were not reproduced; but, instead, the walls of all the four arms were pierced by tall round-headed lights. Each arm was finished, on each of its three faces, with a low pediment, and at each of the outer angles of the structure, between these pedi-

ments, rose a low, square turret with a pyramidal roof. All the roofs were of stone, and they were laid, as in Provençal churches, directly upon the exterior curves of the ceiling.

Patient examination of a much-injured fabric, aided by the evidence of old prints and descriptions, thus portrays the church of St. Front as it stood when first completed. But it was often injured, and in part renewed with conspicuous alterations; and then, some thirty years ago, it was almost entirely reconstructed. Of course this reconstruction professed to be a restoration, but its faithfulness may be estimated from a single fact. In no way was the church more interesting, significant, or individual than in the pointed shape of its huge arches. But the «restorer»—the noted architect Abadie—rebuilt these arches in a semicircular shape. Of course an innovation of so radical a kind throws doubt upon all the other portions of his work, and especially upon the design of the apse which had been destroyed and replaced in a Gothic period.

The great white interior of St. Front now looks bald and bare indeed if one remembers the gorgeoussness of St. Mark's. But we cannot believe that it was ever as gorgeous as St. Mark's. There exists no trace and no tradition of marble overlays or mosaics; we can fancy nothing more than paint as the original covering of the walls; and the sculptured decoration was always as sparse as it is today. Yet, white and plain as it now stands, and reconstructed none too faithfully although we know it to be, this great interior makes a powerful impression upon eye and mind. It is imposingly stern of aspect, but not gloomy or oppressive. It has the interest of something unfamiliar, unexpected. It has the merit of a vigorous architectural idea unflatteringly expressed without dependence upon ornament. It has the beauty of great and very simple massiveness and of harmonious proportions. And above all it has the peaceful dignity, the large serenity, the soaring and yet brooding strength, which only wide spaces covered by domical ceilings can possess.

#### V.

AFTER this second church of St. Front was finished, three bays of the nave of the original Early Christian edifice remained, as I have said, forming an ante-church at its western end. One of them, next to the crudely adorned ancient façade, was transformed into a sort of vestibule and covered by a small dome, and above the other two a tower was





CENTRAL LANTERN AND TOWER ABOVE THE NORTHERN TRANSEPT-ARM, CATHEDRAL OF ST. PETER, ANGOULÊME.

carried to a height of nearly two hundred feet.

When I was in Périgueux in the year 1889, and when Mr. Pennell was there, the tower of St. Front was taking its turn amid the perils of reconstruction. It was wholly invisible behind a network of scaffolding, and I have always been afraid to inquire whether it was really being reconstructed or in some way «improved.» However, there are plenty of pictures to show its ancient estate, and one of them is reproduced as our initial letter. It is the very oldest of all the old church-towers in France, and it is as interesting for its individuality as for its age.

Neither classic Rome nor Byzantium constructed lofty towers, but when Early Christian builders wanted them, Roman art furnished more adaptable motives than Byzantine. The tower of St. Front speaks of Byzantium only in its domical roof; all its other features are distinctly Roman. Yet these Roman features are not adapted as they were in other districts. The tower of St. Front differs radically from the early Italian campanile type which we saw in the tower of St. Trophime at Arles; and it differs quite as much from more strictly French types developed nearer at hand, as may be seen by comparing it with the Angoulême tower illus-





ONE BAY OF THE NAVE, CATHEDRAL OF ST. PETER, ANGOULÊME.

trated on page 925. When we remember that, although it was built a little later than the Byzantinesque church to which it was attached, it was itself a work of local inspiration; and when we see that it is not even Romanesque, but merely Early Christian in style, then, indeed, it is interesting to find that it recalls most forcibly, not any work of its own or of contiguous periods, but the work of Renaissance architects, returning afresh, after the rise and fall of Romanesque and of Gothic architecture, to the precedents of classic Rome, and not so much the designs of the earliest Renaissance architects as of those who, in the sixteenth century, were led by Palladio. I do not mean that Palladio or his followers ever built a tower like this; only that its features and their treatment resemble the features and the treatment which they turned to other ends.

Naturally the men of the eleventh century were not Palladians in experience, skill, or taste, and the tower of St. Front is much too naïve in idea and too crude in execution ever to be mistaken for a piece of their work. Nevertheless, it is fine in idea and imposingly dignified in effect, and the inexperience of its builders was much more plainly revealed by their constructional than by their artistic devices. They set the successive stages of their tower in retreat, so that the weight of the upper ones did not fall fully on the walls beneath; and although most of the windows were blocked for the sake of greater firmness when the structure was repaired after a fire in the twelfth century, it is a marvel that it did not need an entire rebuilding long before our day. The circular upper stage was surrounded by a ring of closely set columns, varying in size and form,—evidently



stolen spoils from classic buildings,—and the roof was finished with a pine-cone, to correspond with the finish of the lateral domes of the church.

St. Front was not made the cathedral-church of Périgueux until the seventeenth century. St. Stephen's, in the Cité, now called the Old Cathedral, held the bishop's chair. It was built, or rebuilt, at nearly the same time as St. Front, and the influence of the latter is clearly apparent. We do not find again the Greek-cross ground-plan; nor, indeed, was this ground-plan ever again employed in France. But the plan was as the plan of St. Front would be if shorn of three of its arms. There were no aisles, as in basilican churches: the Old Cathedral had merely a very broad nave of two bays, each covered by a dome, and probably a semicircular apse; the taller choir with the larger dome which we see to-day was added in the twelfth century.

The novel success of St. Front was appreciated quite as quickly in other towns as in Périgueux itself. Not only elsewhere in Périgord, but in Auvergne toward the east, and in the districts called Angoumois and Saintonge toward the west, churches similar in plan to the Old Cathedral of Périgueux were built before the end of the eleventh century—without aisles, and with domes and external cupolas. And then, in the twelfth century, in Saintonge and Angoumois, in Poitou toward the north, and still farther north in Anjou, beyond the river Loire, many other domical churches large and small arose, showing the influence of St. Front in more modified but still very manifest ways. One of the earliest and most interesting among the buildings of this class is the Cathedral of St. Peter in Angoulême, at which, in a moment, I shall ask you to look.

The Romanesque styles of France were too vigorously developing from local roots, as expressions of local needs and tastes, to be radically transformed by any external force. The style of Périgord did not become Byzantine, nor did the styles of neighboring provinces docilely follow the example of Périgord. Nevertheless, all were deeply affected by the lessons learned from the East by the builders of St. Front, and the best, the most important, of these lessons was the one most eagerly and widely accepted. This was the lesson how to build ceilings of stone which should preserve a church from the fires so constantly encouraged by ceilings of wood. No one taught this lesson to the more northerly provinces of France. They developed their own methods of stone vaulting. Natu-

rally their success was tardier, and meanwhile the demon of fire was busy. Therefore large Early Romanesque churches are rare in the North, while they abound in the provinces I have named, often almost perfectly preserved to our own late day.

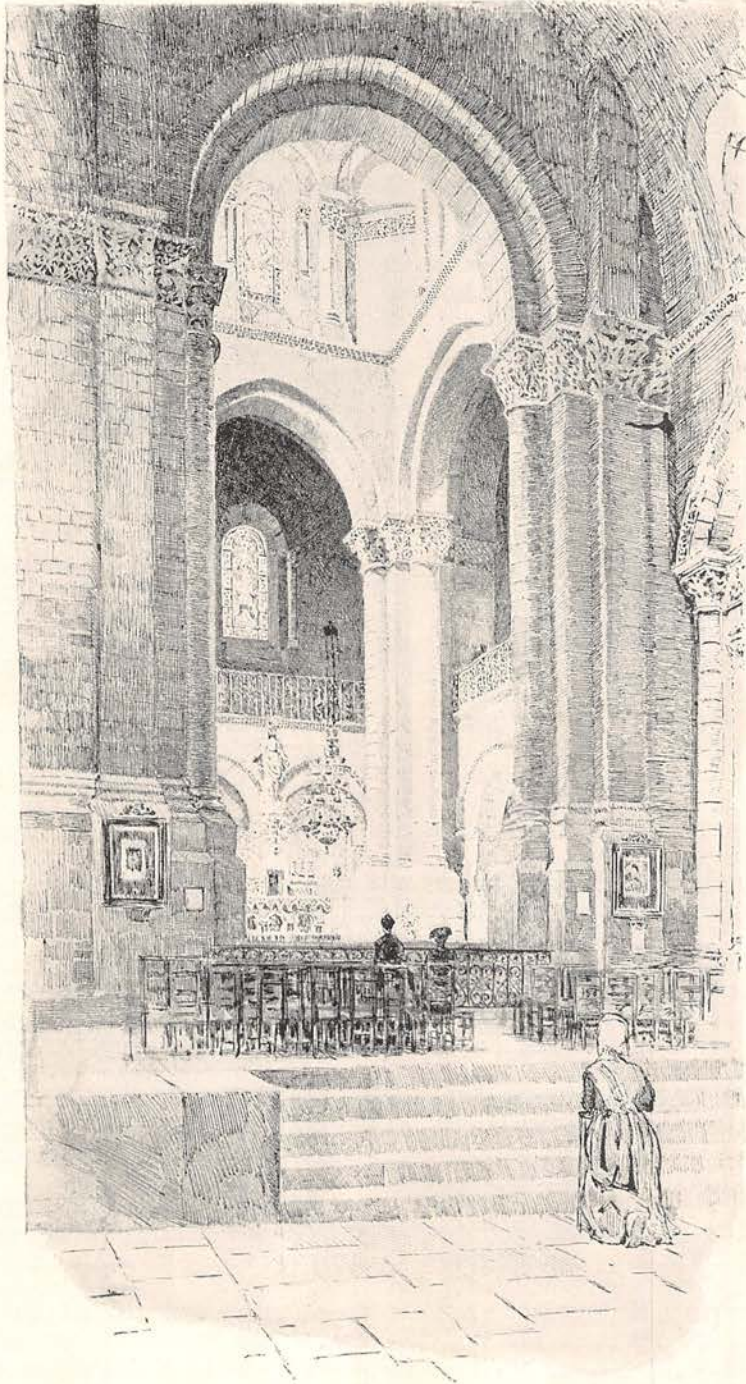
## VI.

A BROAD, isolated hill about two hundred feet in height, with two winding rivers near its base; a hill with almost perpendicular sides and a plateau-like top, covered closely with buildings and edged with trees—this is Angoulême. In Roman days it lay within a triangle formed by the three chief highways of these western districts, left aside when, with their customary directness, the great road-builders of antiquity connected Périgueux, Saintes, Limoges, and Poitiers. For this reason Ausonius wrote of it, «*Iculisma . . . devio ac solo loco*»; and to-day we cannot suspect that Rome ever valued it unless we look underground or within museum walls. But the relics here preserved prove that it was an important place to the Romans, and its strong position kept it important through all the warring centuries which stretched between the collapse of their power and the firm consolidation of the modern kingdom of France.

During the fifth century Angoulême, like Périgueux, was included in the Visigothic kingdom; in later times—Merovingian, Carolingian, early Capetian—it had its full share of the troubles caused by internecine strife and by Saracenic and Norman invasions; and still later, rather more than its full share of those due to the strife between England and France. During a period of three hundred years few other foreign towns are so constantly cited in histories of England; and Isabel, the second wife of King John, was daughter and heiress of Aymar Taillefer, Count of Angoulême.

After the Taillefers, the Lusignans—whose name rings very loudly but not very nobly in crusading tales—were the counts of Angoulême. When the last of them died, in 1303, their heritage was attached to the crown of France; and down to the time of the Revolution the duchy of Angoulême was usually the appanage of some prince or princess of the blood. But as long as the English wars continued, all places in this region were really owned by him who could take and keep them. After Angoulême had passed more than once from hand to hand, they were all ceded to England by the treaty of Brétigny in 1360,





BENEATH THE TRANSEPT TOWER, CATHEDRAL OF ST. PETER, ANGOULÊME.

and not until the year 1451 were they wholly delivered from fear of the foreigner.

In the following century fresh disturbances began. Protestantism took strong hold upon the west of France, and one can hardly won-

der at its growth if the bishops of Angoulême were fair samples of their class. For forty years their flocks never once beheld the face of any one of them. They preferred to disport themselves at the court of the pope or



the king. Everywhere in these provinces the wars of religion raged with peculiar virulence, and in Angoulême they were further embittered by the fact that the greatest local family, the family of La Rochefoucauld, was itself divided between the old faith and the new. Reading the story of the sixteenth century in Angoulême, you might easily fancy yourself back in the bloodthirsty days of Visigoths and Franks.

While her father, Charles of Orléans, was Duke of Angoulême, Margaret of Valois was born within its walls—the sister of Francis I., the grandmother of Henry IV., the Margâret of the «*Heptameron*,» *la Marguerite des Marguerites*. Ravaillac, the assassin of Henry IV., was also born there, and Jean-Louis Balzac—the Balzac of the seventeenth, not of the nineteenth century; and to match Montaigne, the great essay-writer whom Périgueux honors, Angoulême boasts of the great maxim-maker, La Rochefoucauld, whose ancestral castle still exists only a few miles away.

The Visigoths fortified Angoulême with materials taken from its Roman buildings; and for many centuries the edges of its hill were girt with walls and towers, while the taller towers of feudal dwellings rose from its streets and squares. Now nothing military remains except a polygonal keep built by the Lusignans, and a round one built by Valois princes, both rather awkwardly incorporated with the modern town hall. On the site of the ramparts broad tree-set promenades encircle the town, widening on the north into lovely, shady gardens which, in terraced levels, stretch far down the flank of the hill. From these gardens you may look out over a fertile plain watered by the winding Charente, beloved of Henry IV., and from the southern verge of the hill you may trace the smaller stream of the Anguienne by its curving rows of poplars, while rocky plateaus and little arid hills diversify the landscape toward the east. From every point along this charming circuit the view is admirable; and seen from the plain below, the town makes a picturesque effect, especially on its southern side, where, close to the steep brow of the cliff, fronting on a spacious *place*, the cathedral lifts its conical dome, its lofty tower, and its tall and turreted façade.

Angoulême, while not exactly picturesque, is a very attractive town. It is a rich manufacturing town of some 35,000 inhabitants; and so, while you need not fear the rather depressed appearance of Périgueux, you need not expect the romantic ancient look of Avignon or Arles. But, on the other

hand, although it has been modernized in almost all its features, Angoulême has not the aspect of a typically modern commercial city, for its great factories and workshops stand down in the plain near the banks of its rivers. If I thought that an American term would be understood with a marked transatlantic difference, I should say that Angoulême has a sort of «colonial» air—a quiet air which does not mean stagnation, a rather remote air which does not mean real antiquity, an air at once placid and alive, leisurely and well-to-do, provincial and well-bred; an air as of a place a little away from the world, a little back of to-day, yet not out of the world, not forgotten by to-day. You will not be astonished or excited, but you will be pleased and content, the moment you enter it; and although it has little to show except its cathedral, its gardens, and the views from its ramparts, you will be sorry when you are obliged to leave it.

## VII.

WHERE the Cathedral of St. Peter now stands, on the highest part of the hill, an Early Christian cathedral, probably of wood, was burned in the year 981. A stone church, similar in plan to the Old Cathedral of Périgueux, soon replaced it; and in the twelfth century, when growing episcopal ambition reconstructed so many Northern cathedrals, this one was enlarged and enriched. The work was done by Bishop Gérard,—whose episcopate lasted from 1101 to 1136,—and so thoroughly that the western bay of the nave alone retained its primitive aspect.

It is interesting to examine in how far Gérard was swayed by the example of St. Front, now a hundred years of age, and in how far he returned to old basilican precedents. He revived the Latin-cross ground-plan by the addition of a short transept, but did not revive the basilican pier-arcades and aisles. He adorned his walls with a richer and more vigorous version of the blank arcades of St. Front, and placed his windows above them, opening internally upon narrow galleries. Outside, a continuous slanting wooden roof of old basilican pattern replaced the Byzantine cupolas; but inside, each bay was covered by a domical ceiling, and the great arches were again slightly pointed, although their pendentives were built in a much more skilful manner than at Périgueux. An open lantern of domical character covered the crossing of nave and transept. Over each of the transept-arms—which were treated as



chapels with wide, high galleries—rose a rectangular tower more than a hundred and sixty feet in height, with a domical ceiling at the level of its second stage; and the façade of basilican churches, which had been allowed no place in the scheme of St. Front, appeared again, and achieved its true Romanesque importance.

Few churches have suffered more during eight hundred years of life than Gérard's cathedral, and as we see it to-day it is largely a reconstruction. Gérard himself did not quite complete it. The upper part of the façade above the main arcade and the window was added after his time; and as old prints portray the tower above the southern transept-arm with Gothic features and a slender spire, it was probably being finished in the year 1259, when, as we read in a letter still preserved, Hugh de Lusignan so violently quarreled with his clergy that he forbade materials required for the cathedral to be admitted within the gates of the town. Then the Hundred Years' War meant long periods of utter neglect, and the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries many Gothic alterations; in the sixteenth century the Huguenots pillaged and burned and mutilated the cathedral, it was scarred by the shots of besiegers, and its Gothic tower collapsed; in the first half of the seventeenth century it was sedulously repaired after the Renaissance fashion of that time; and then, like St. Front, it was taken in hand by Abadie, some forty years ago, and practically rebuilt. He might have done worse by it, and also he might have done somewhat better.

The tall Romanesque tower over the northern transept-arm was taken down, and, stone by stone, carefully reconstructed. This, I believe, we may trust as entirely veracious; and comparing it with the tower at Périgueux, we realize the great advance that art had made during a single century, even along a path where Byzantium afforded no assistance. Here there is a clear, logical, fresh conception, a beautiful harmony and balance of parts, a free, perfected use of non-classical types of ornament; in short, a consistent and rich expression of a new and individual style. This is not a tower built up of more or less coherent parts, but a tower vigorously imagined as an entity. Here no one can think of ancient Rome except as the mother of a child who has outgrown all need for tutelage, and whose ideals and expedients are entirely different from her own.

The façade would probably please us better could we see it as Bishop Gérard meant that

we should. The sculptures on the portion which he built represent scenes from the Day of Judgment—scenes perpetually portrayed in medieval art, but never, perhaps, on another page as large as this; and they all lead up to the figure of Christ in Glory which fills the great central arch. Above this crowning, completing feature other sculptured scenes can hardly have been planned, nor conspicuous ornamentation of any kind; and the unpleasing proportions of the façade as it now stands lead us to imagine the intended one much lower and with smaller angle-towers.

The domes of the nave were originally covered, as I have said, by a slanting roof which concealed their exteriors, and this the restorer has retained; but he seems to have gone outside his documents in raising a cupola rather than a low tower over the central dome at the crossing of nave and transept; he was hardly justified in introducing a sculptured tympanum in the main doorway of the façade, for the Romanesque portals of Saintonge are usually without it;<sup>1</sup> and he certainly was not justified in altering the western bay of the nave so that it no longer clearly shows the aspect of the eleventh-century church which elsewhere Bishop Gérard had transformed. This is one of those crimes—committed for the sake of a mendacious architectural uniformity while the innovator is professing to be simply a restorer—which, if you are a true lover of ancient art, you find it impossible to forgive.

#### VIII.

NEVERTHELESS, when you enter the cathedral of Angoulême, and submit yourself to the impression which it produces as a whole, your indignation at this modern crime or that, and your doubts in regard to this or that historical question, will disappear, and also your craving for the picturesque in architecture, and even your dislike for new-looking old interiors. Angoulême is new-looking from end to end, not picturesque in effect, and very clean and white. Yet it has not that mechanical look, that raw and chilly, bald and staring look, which must have afflicted you sorely in many an ancient church less radically restored.

This, I think, is because the scheme is both strictly architectural and very simple. It depends for its effect upon its constructional

<sup>1</sup> The district about Angoulême was Angoumois, while Saintonge lay farther to the west, with Saintes as its principal town. But the Romanesque styles of the two districts are similar, and illustrate what is usually called the *école de la Saintonge*.



beauty, very little indeed upon its adornment. The sculptor has decorated only the capitals of the great piers and of the arcades, and all the arch-members show plain square sections. Beautiful proportions, beautiful, strong, and simple lines, beautiful, broad spaces of wall and pier and dome, give this church its character; and so, of course, it is radically unlike those columned and galleried and many-windowed churches which, whether they were built early or late in medieval times, whether they are heavily solemn or delicately exuberant in effect, always appeal more or less to the sense for the romantic, the picturesque. In no form or feature except its ceilings is Angoulême like a classical structure of any kind, yet we admire it with the same side of our enthusiasm that classic art awakens. And we must choose the same words to describe it. It is soberly yet gracefully dignified. It is reserved, refined, aristocratic, and elegant in a very noble sense. It is stately, it is serene, it has a wonderful air of distinction. And it wins all these qualities by virtue of its harmonious, its admirably conceived and finished simplicity. Therefore it produces a vaguely classical impression such as I have recognized in no other medieval church; and therefore it is not injured, to our modern taste, by the clean whiteness of its modern color. Probably all parts of classic buildings, and all parts of this cathedral also, were originally brilliant with many hues; but accustomed to their absence, you do not miss these hues from a Grecian temple, and I think you will not miss them in Angoulême. The naked beauty of the architectural idea will perfectly content you.

As you might expect, a certain classic impress does survive in the decorative details, but it is much less pronounced than at Périgueux. Here there are no true Gallo-Roman motives; the old elements have been mingled with new ones, learned from Byzantium or from the North, and have been bent to the realization of new general ideals, new special types of beauty.

Much of the impressiveness of this serene and pure interior comes from the quality of the illumination. Not the richest splendor of colored rays cast by the Gothic windows of the North is more poetic than the clear, softly tempered glow that falls, from far above our

heads, through the high-placed windows of the nave—clear, yet softly tempered even when a summer sun is shining at its brightest outside; and with this mild and pearly light contrast effectively a greenish light from the *grisaille* windows in the dome, and a stronger, whiter flood pouring into the chapel beneath the transept-tower.

The interior of Angoulême cathedral is characteristically Southern, and the façade is Southern too, but in a different way. Here you will find exuberance, lavishness, ornamental richness of detail, and symbolical richness of meaning—a decorator's rather than an architect's triumph. By contrast it seems as though the soul of some dead Greek had entered into the Romanesque artist who designed Angoulême's nave, the soul of some Oriental into his brother who built the western front. Then, taking the point of view indicated in the picture on page 925, you may again forget the luxuriance of the façade, and find delight in simpler, more truly architectural lines. Abadie's cupola is beautiful whether it is veraciously historical or not; the tall tower is so boldly regal that you cannot wish that its supremacy had been impaired by the reconstruction of its mate above the other transept-arm; and against the creamy stones of the apse the branches of the foreground trees paint an exquisite network of emerald green.

Pray that the sun may shine while you look at the exterior of this church. And after you have seen it well, and have learned by heart the views from the balustraded edge of the square which stretches up the hill in front of it, and those from all other portions of the ramparts, and after you have seen all else that Angoulême has to show, and have rested in its silent, shadowy, terraced gardens, be sure to return within the cathedral doors. Let the last picture you carry away from Angoulême be a picture of the stately, gracious space beneath its broadly, gently-sweeping domes. Note once more how calm is its dignity, how noble its elegance, and how refreshing its cool quietude and purity to an eye that is wearied by the blaze of Southern sunlight. Then, perhaps, you may imagine upon how many human souls, during its eight cycles of a hundred years, it must have laid a touch like that of the soothing hand of the Mother of Christ.

M. G. Van Rensselaer.