



LE PUY DE DÔME, HAUTE-LOIRE, FRANCE.

THE NEEDLE AND CHAPEL OF ST. MICHAEL, AT LE PUY.

LE PUY, capital of the department of the Haute-Loire, France, stands on a steep acclivity, and boasts a very picturesque appearance (at a distance), a Gothic cathedral of the tenth century, and a statue of the Virgin, brought from Egypt by St. Louis. The town carries on a trade in lace—is gradually improving in its condition and prospects—possesses a commercial college, a museum, library, bishop's

palace, law court, hospital, theatre, &c. &c. But more interesting to the artist, the tourist, or the antiquary, than any feature of the town itself, is the singular-shaped rock, shown in our engraving, which rises to the height of three hundred feet, and is crowned by a church.

This lion of Le Puy is celebrated, throughout Velay and Auvergne, as the Needle, a term which well describes its remarkable form. At the first glance, the rock appears inaccessible, and it is difficult to account for the structure on the summit—the church

dedicated to St. Michael, which is traditionally reported to occupy the site of a heathen temple to Mercury. A closer examination, however, discloses a precipitous ascent by means of steps hewn out of the rock. This laborious and somewhat difficult enterprise is attributed to an ecclesiastical dignitary of the town, who conceived the design and partially carried it into execution in the tenth century. Probably the canon only discovered or "restored" the work of older hands; since, if there was once a temple on the summit, some means of access to it must have previously existed.

The first stone of the Church of St. Michael was laid in 965, but the edifice was not finished until about the middle of the following century. At present it is composed of a choir and semi-elliptic nave, with six slender columns, arranged in a half-circle, from which springs a graceful dome. The remaining columns divide the church into arches, and are evidently of the date of the eleventh century. The walls of the building are covered with frescoes, very roughly executed. The belfry has little to recommend it, either in its style or position; but helps to make the church more striking when seen from a distance.

The principal entrance is enriched with enamels and some singularly fine bas-reliefs. These form very good specimens of the Byzantine art, prevalent at the period when the church was erected.

An open gallery, at a short distance from the entrance, leads to a small building originally intended for a sacristan. A cistern is hewn in the rock in the immediate proximity of the choir.

Several specimens of Byzantine sculpture are seen in the walls which confine the rocky staircase; and many of these are highly valuable as works of art.

The rock has excited considerable attention for a very long period, and its praises were sung two hundred and fifty years ago by Canon Bernard; now-a-days its celebrity is chiefly confined to artists' sketch-books and travelling note-books; but it is unquestionably interesting; nature and art have joined to make St. Michael's Needle one of the thousand wonders of the world.

The date of the foundation of Le Puy is uncertain.

In the history of France it is chiefly remarkable for having suffered severely during the wars of the League. It is watered by the Borne, which is crossed at this point by a bridge of eight arches. The town is badly paved and inconveniently built; sanitary commissioners would find plenty to do before it could be approved by a board of health; but, however this may detract from Le Puy as an eligible residence, it does not in any degree impugn the interest which belongs to the singular rock, and no less singular church of St. Michael.