

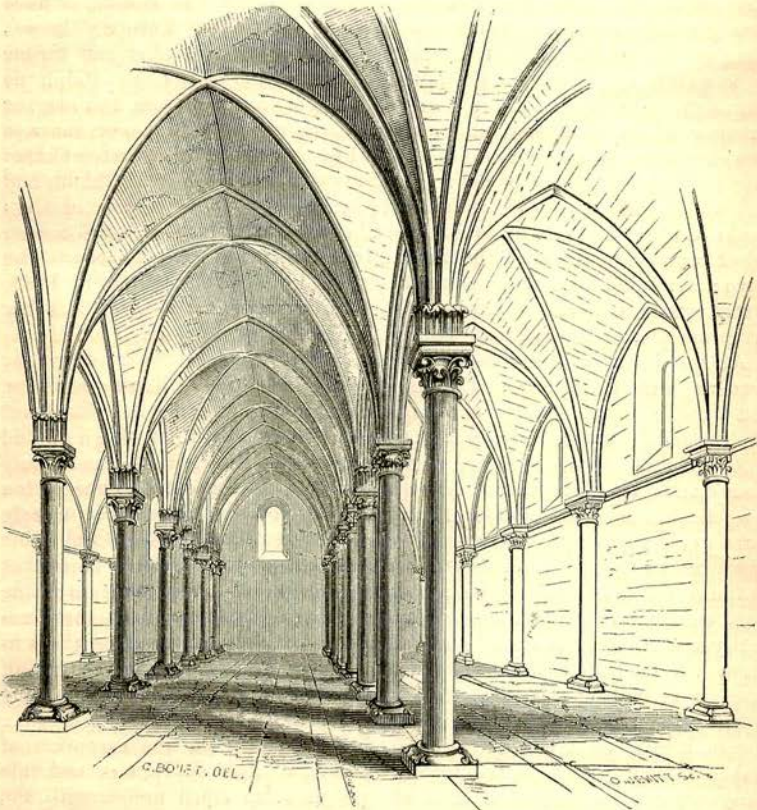
CORRESPONDENCE OF SYLVANUS URBAN.

THE EARLIEST GOTHIC BUILDINGS, AND THE REVIVAL OF
GOTHIC FOR DOMESTIC PURPOSES.*Oxford, Feb. 1st, 1859.*

MR. URBAN,—According to promise I now send you an engraving of the hall of the Hospital of St. John at Angers, which appears to me the most advanced in style for its date of any building that I have seen, or have been able to get any authentic account of, in any part of Europe. It was founded by Henry II. in the same year that he ascended the throne of England, A.D. 1154, and was consecrated A.D. 1184, by Ralph de Beaumont, Bishop of Angers. The style is remarkably light and elegant for that period, as will be seen by comparing it with the heavy, massive choir of Notre Dame de Paris, 1163—1185, or even with Soissons Cathedral, the earliest part of which, the south transept, was built in 1168, and the greater part of the church from 1175 to 1212. The corona of Canterbury Cathedral, 1179—1184, closely resembles the transept of Soissons, but neither of them is so far advanced as the Hospital at Angers. The Cathedral of Sens was almost entirely destroyed by a great fire in 1184, and the present structure erected almost immediately afterwards, probably by William of Sens *after* his return from Canterbury, which it closely resembles.

The hall of the Hospital at Angers is divided into three parallel aisles by two rows of pillars and arches, which can hardly be called anything but pure Gothic, the square abacus being a regular feature of foreign Gothic down to a much later period. The vaulting with its ribs is remarkably good, and bears a striking resemblance to Early English Gothic, too close, it appears to me, both in appearance and in construction to be merely accidental; and as Henry II. held his court at Angers frequently while this building was in the course of erection under his eye, and his court was attended by many English nobles and prelates, it seems highly probable that they brought home new ideas with them, architecture being then the rage with all classes; it was just the time when the movement was in the zenith of its activity, and hundreds of churches were building in all parts of England, as we know by the best evidence, for there they now stand to tell their own story.

This hall appears to have been always intended for the reception of patients, whose beds are ranged in six rows against the pillars and side walls. The windows are small and round-headed, which agrees with the transitional character of the building, and proves that it has not been rebuilt, as has sometimes been said without any ground whatever for the assertion, excepting that the style does not harmonize with a preconceived theory. When a building is really in a *different* style from its historical date, we may fairly assume that it has been rebuilt; but no one would assign a later date, judging from the style only, than 1200 to this hall, and it is far more probable that it is a few years in advance in style, than that it was rebuilt within twenty or thirty years after its erection. The chapel which joins on to this hall is very similar to it in style, the only difference being, I believe, in the vaulting. The doorways of both hall and chapel are round-headed but with very bold and good round mouldings, and with



HALL OF THE HOSPITAL AT ANGERS. A.D. 1151—1181.

detached shafts in the jambs. The windows of the chapel differ from those of the hall; they are longer, have shafts in the jambs, are not all alike, but more decidedly transitional and of later character than those of the hall.

The Cathedral of Angers, which was consecrated in 1150, is of a much heavier style, with enormous square buttresses, and no aisles; the vaulting is of the usual Angevine character, which is a transition from the Byzantine to the Gothic, domical, but with low domes covered by a roof. The vaulting of the Hospital is evidently taken from this, but is a considerable step in advance, and approaches more closely to English Gothic vaulting than to the previous Angevine style. The observation of M. Viollet Leduc, that there was at all periods a Byzantine element in English Gothic, derived through Anjou, and afterwards developed in Henry the Seventh's Chapel, King's College Chapel, and fan-tracery vaulting generally, appears to me to be well founded, and to shew his usual sagacity, keen observation, and thorough knowledge of his subject. If English architects would follow the example of French ones, and instead of railing at antiquarianism and glorying in their own ignorance of the history of their art, would emulate the laborious researches of their rivals, it would be far better for themselves and for the country. We should not then have such despised antiquarian books as the "Glossary of Architecture" used like a tailor's pattern-book, to select pretty bits and stick them up all over the face of the country and the town; nor could they make a rapid excursion into Italy and bring home pretty bits in their sketch-books to stick up in the same manner, however inappropriate, and then plume themselves on their originality.

At the back of the Hospital at Angers is the large barn, or public granary of the town, one of the largest and finest that I know anywhere, and which also has equally large and fine wine-cellars under it. The barn, like the hall, is divided into three parallel aisles by two rows of pillars and arches of transitional character, but not nearly so light, nor so much advanced in style. The exact history of this barn is not known, except that it is said to have been built by Henry II., but from the coincidence of style and date, it appears to be connected with the great famine with which those provinces were afflicted in 1176, which seems to have been very similar to the recent famine in Ireland; and as there was at that period much the same connexion and intercourse between England and Anjou as there recently was between England and Ireland, so in like manner England undertook to feed the starving inhabitants. This great barn appears to have been either built at the time to employ the inhabitants, or built immediately afterwards to guard against the recurrence of a similar calamity. The king also built mills on the river Maine, of which the piers and some of the arches remain. It is stated by the chronicler, Ralf de Diceto, that the king undertook to feed ten thousand people from April to harvest-time, A.D. 1176.

The east end of the Cathedral of Poitiers was also built by Henry II., and is remarkable for being square, according to the English fashion, which is rare in France. The style is also transitional, and considerably advanced, but not quite so light and elegant as this Hospital at Angers, although, as might be expected, there is not much difference between them, both being building at the same time.

It may be asked what has all this antiquarianism to do with the practical question of the revival of Gothic for domestic buildings. I answer thus:— If it can be clearly proved that the English have a national style of their own, distinct from any foreign style in its origin, its history, its progress

and development, and not only in its architectural details, then those architects who are endeavouring to introduce the Italian Gothic under the pretext of reviving our national style, are fighting under false colours, and if they obtain a triumph, it is not likely to be a lasting one. It is not a mere question of *æsthetics*; if the followers of Mr. Ruskin consider the Italian Gothic more beautiful than the English, let them say so openly, every one may have his own opinion on a mere matter of taste: I do not agree with them, and I believe that the number of those who do is very limited. As a matter of history, I believe it can be proved that the Parisian style, though it approaches the nearest to the English, is still quite distinct from it. We must remember that in the twelfth century, when Gothic architecture was developed, the large territory which now forms the French empire was divided into a number of small states, each of which had a style of architecture of its own, each different from the other, but all derived from the Roman, excepting the English, which has a mixture of Byzantine with the Roman, which came to us by the same route as the silks, and spices, and other products of the East, the usual line of commerce at that period, of which Limoges was a central depot. And this line can be distinctly traced by the fine churches along its course.

It should be observed, also, that the western provinces of France, which formed part of the English dominions at the time of the development of Gothic, and which are usually known among French antiquaries by the name of the English Provinces, are full of valuable and interesting examples, by which the history of architecture, the gradual progress and development from the Roman and Byzantine to the Gothic, can be more clearly traced than anywhere else. It is true, as I observed long ago, that the English have left scarcely any traces of their occupation during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, being, apparently, too much occupied in fighting to attend to building; but it is equally clear that at an earlier period the English architects studied there to a considerable extent. There is a particular class of buildings in Angers, Poitou, and Maine, which the French antiquaries call the "Style Plantagenet," and although this style is not English, it may have taught much to English architects. It is certain that many features are found there considerably earlier than in England or in other parts of France; for instance, the well-known tooth-ornament, which in England is a characteristic of the thirteenth century, and the ball-flower, which is here rarely found much before the fourteenth, are both common there in work of the twelfth.

It happens also that in England we have scarcely any remains of houses in towns of the thirteenth or fourteenth century, while in the English provinces of France we have many, and thus modern architects can there find all that they want just as well as in any foreign country, while the details are at the same time better Gothic, and more in harmony with the English style than the Italian, which is just now so much in fashion. It is quite clear that the English architects did not study in Lombardy, and that the English Gothic is a national style distinct from any foreign style; and that during the period when it prevailed, it was used for every purpose, and not at all confined to churches. The Oxford Museum, and the Rector's house at Exeter College, Oxford, are proofs that modern architects can apply it to any purpose, and that Gothic buildings are not necessarily dark or inconvenient. When such is the case, the fault is in the architect, not in the style.

As this subject of the development of the Gothic style, treated histori-

cally by careful investigation, and not theoretically or æsthetically only, is, I believe, one of considerable interest to many of your numerous readers, I hope you will make room for this letter, and for the documents which I append to it. These are:—1. The charter of foundation of the Hospital, from Hirot's *Antiquités d'Anjou*; 2. An extract from the *Gallia Christiana*, recording the consecration of the chapel; 3. An extract from Bodin, *Recherches Historique sur l'Anjou*, respecting the famine; 4. An extract from Ralf de Diceto on the same subject.

Your obedient Servant,

J. H. PARKER.

“Henricus Dei gratia Rex Angliæ et Dux Normanniæ et Comes Andegavia, Archiepiscopis, Episcopis, Abbatibus, Baronibus, Justitiis, Vicecomitibus, Senescalis, præpositis, et omnibus ministris et fidelibus suis, salutem. Sciatis me pro salute et redemptione animarum patris et matris meæ et antecessorum meorum fundasse et construxisse apud *Andegavos* iuxta fontem sancti Laurentij Hospitale quoddam quod ibi situm est in honore Dei ad sustentamentum et revelationem pauperum Dei. Ego autem pietate motus super inopia et necessitate tam sanorum quam infirmorum inhabitantium in ipso Hospitali, dedi eis et concessi, et præsentî carta mea confirmavi exclusam meam Andegavensem, quam ex proprijs meis sumptibus feci, et à primo lapide fundavi habendam et tenendam in liberam et perpetuam Eleemosinam sicut eam melius habui cum omni emendatione quam ibi facere poterunt tam molendinorum quam aliarum rerum ad eandem exclusam pertinentium, quare volo et firmiter præcipio quod prædictum hospitale et pauperes Christi in eodem habitantes, prædictam exclusam habeant et teneant in libera et perpetua eleemosina absque omni calumnia et reclamatione alicuius, benè et in pace liberè quietè integrè, plenarie et honorificè cum omnibus pertinentijs et libertatibus, et liberis consuetudinibus suis. Si quis verò præscriptam donationem meam infringere vel cassare attentaverit vel aliquo modo minuere præsumperit omnipotentis Dei malevolentiam, iram et indignationè incurrat, et meam, testibus Guillelmo Episcopo Cenomanensi [Le Mans], Goffrido Episcopo Cistrensi, M. Guillelmo Constanciensi [Coutances], Mauricio de Craon, Richardo Vicecomite de Beaumont, Lanceloto de Vandosme, &c. apud Cenomanos.”—*Hirot, Antiquités d'Anjou*.

Radulfus de Beaumont, Episcopus Andegavensis anno 1184:—“Benedicit Eleemosynam Andegavensem quam rex Anglorum Henricus condiderat, dominum autem Pentecostem sub moderamine canonicorum regulorum Divi Augustini.”—*Gallia Christiana*, tom. ii. p. 136.

A.D. 1176. “Ce même Raoul de Diceto dont nous venons de parler nous apprend que dans une disette qui affligea l'Anjou et le Touraine à la suite d'une très grande sécheresse, ce prince envoya d'Angleterre de quoi nourrir chaque jour dix mille hommes depuis le mois d'Avril jusqu'à la moisson. Pendant toute sa vie Henri conserva beaucoup d'affection pour son pays natal comme le témoignent ce trait de générosité les établissements qu'il fit dans cette province, et même un des articles de son testament par lequel il légua cent marcs d'argent pour marier les pauvres *damizelles* d'Anjou, c'est à dire, les filles nobles, car alors les autres ni étoient rien.”—*Bodin, Recherches Historiques sur l'Anjou*, tom. i. p. 286.

“Andegaviæ Cenomannia finibus panis inedia laborantibus rex pater regis a Kal. Aprilis usque ad futurarum frugum habundantiam, decem milibus hominum diebus singulis alimenta sufficienter invenit. Quicquid etiam vel in horreis vel in cellis vinariis vel in promptuariis regis usibus insulari reservaverant, mandato regis totum pijs collegiis et pauperibus rogatum est.”—*Radulfo de Diceto, ap. Twisden Decem Scriptores*, fol. 1652, p. 589.