

## THE CHURCHES OF POITIERS AND CAEN.<sup>1</sup>

WITH PICTURES BY JOSEPH PENNELL.

POITIERS, like Angoulême, is a city set on a low and rugged hill, but its hill is fashioned in a different way. Some one has compared it to a tea-cup inverted in a saucer, for a valley encircles it, threaded by two joining streams, and the opposite slopes rise steeply, with broad faces or tall pinnacles of rock. The top of the hill is less level than at Angoulême, and its sides are less precipitous, and are largely clothed with buildings. Thus everywhere the streets of Poitiers climb and twist; they are mostly narrow streets of antiquated aspect, and they lead to several irregular little squares, to four or five Romanesque churches remarkable for their local character and yet for their diversity among themselves, to a well-preserved Gothic château, and to many quaint old dwellings. In its temper the city of to-day seems busier, brisker, livelier than either Périgueux or Angoulême, but in its body it has a more truly medieval air than they. Seen from without or seen from within, Poitiers is not very boldly picturesque; nevertheless, few towns in France more constantly gratify the eye of the artist, and very few so variously stimulate the mind of the lover of ancient names and tales.

### I.

UNTIL the year 1857, when they were sold for the building of a market, you might have seen in Poitiers the remains of a Roman amphitheater larger than the one at Nîmes, almost as large as the one at Arles. The fragments of a Roman bath may still be seen there, and on the heights across the valley a curious place of tombs, partly pagan in its origin, and partly early Christian. History also testifies that the stronghold which the Romans called Limonum was of considerable account, and that even before their day it had been the capital of a Gallic tribe whose name is embalmed in its modern title, and who worshiped around the druidical dolmen now called the Pierre-Levée. This is a stone which can boast not merely of prehistoric origin, but of legen-

<sup>1</sup> See «The Churches of Périgueux and Angoulême,» THE CENTURY MAGAZINE, April, 1896.

dary and literary fame. All the world once believed that St. Radegonde, the patron saint and great benefactress of Poitiers, miraculously carried it hither on her head, bearing its supports meanwhile in her muslin apron; that one of these supports unmiraculously dropped through the apron; and that this was why the great oblong block reposed upon three rude legs instead of four. And then Rabelais unfolded a very different explanation. He declared that Pantagruel had set up the stone as a rallying-point for the students of Poitiers in their idle hours—as a picnic-table upon which they might banquet with «*force flacons, jambons et pastés.*»

St. Hilary the Great, famed as the champion of Catholicism against its Arian enemies, was born in Poitiers, and filled its episcopal chair during a part of the fourth century. From Poitiers, early in the sixth century, Alaric II, king of the Visigoths, went forth to be slain by Clovis in the battle which established the supremacy of the Franks; and not far away, on the road to Tours, in the year 732 was fought the still more famous battle in which another Frankish leader, Charles Martel, won his title of «the Hammer,» saving Europe from Mohammedan dominion. In later times Poitiers, with its province of Poitou, was included in the duchy of Aquitaine. Eleanor of Aquitaine (or of Guienne, as the English said) brought it under the English crown when she married Henry II; King John lost it, and Philippe Auguste united it to the crown of France. In 1356, during the Hundred Years' War, was fought the third great battle of Poitiers, when even the potent ghosts of Clovis and Charles Martel could not prevent the overthrow of their descendants, and «the shame of Crécy» was doubled, not wiped away. But sixteen years later Duguesclin won back the city for the French; and after the time of Charles VII, in the following century, it was a permanent part of the royal domain.

Many were the scenes of high or strange historic interest that Poitiers beheld during these belligerent centuries; and many were the notable folk who nobly, wickedly or strangely played their parts therein. We

know little about St. Hilary's godly deeds in the fourth century; but Gregory of Tours says much about St. Radegonde's in the sixth, telling how she fled from her husband, Clotaire I, the son of Clovis and king of all the Franks, and from his semi-pagan court and his other and less holy wives, to found a convent for women in Poitiers, and churches more than one; and a hundred records recite the countless miracles performed at the tombs of these two famous saints in the sanctuaries which still retain their names. Three queens of England variously distinguished themselves at Poitiers: Emma the Norman, wife of Ethelred and then of Canute, and mother of Edward the Confessor, rebuilt the choir of the church of St. Hilary when urged by Canute to gain ecclesiastical favor abroad as well as at home; Eleanor the Aquitanian often revisited the land of her birth, and she and her husband Henry founded the present cathedral of Poitiers; and Isabeau of Angoulême, first the wife of King John of England, and then of Hugues de Lusignan, brought much trouble upon her second spouse by setting fire to her lodging just to show how heartily she despised it and the insignificant Countess of Poitiers who had thought it good enough for a lady once a queen. Early in the fourteenth century Pope Clement V, not yet established at Avignon, tarried long in the capital of Poitou; and here he was forced by Philip the Fair to summon the Knights Templars as though for ecclesiastical business, and then to despatch their leaders to their murdering in Paris. Here Charles VII was proclaimed king of France while most of France was in the hands of the English. Hither he transferred his parliament from Paris; and to be questioned by this parliament he sent Jeanne d'Arc, newly announcing her mission—to be questioned and tested, and asked for a miracle, and splendidly to answer that she would attempt no miracle but the deliverance of Orléans. Here Calvin preached the Reform in the sixteenth century, gathering his proselytes in a suburban grotto which still keeps his name; and here, as at Angoulême, Protestants and Catholics repeatedly besieged and resisted, Coligny once bombarding the town for seven weeks in vain while Guise and Turenne defended it. And these are only a few of the topmost peaks of interest in the long chain of stirring events which happened at Poitiers, now possessing a world-wide importance and again a significant local savor.

The student of medieval architecture may go back in Poitiers to its embryonic stage. Here stands one of the most ancient of post-

classical structures. Perhaps, indeed, it is the very oldest that exists in France, yet none is in better preservation. It is a simple little rectangular building with an apse of later date, and is called the Temple of St. John. This hybrid popular name alone might prove its great antiquity, recording the belief that before it was a Christian baptistery it had been a pagan tomb; and its station speaks with a similar voice—the street levels about it have gradually risen, so that now it stands in a deep hollow like many of the monuments of Athens and of Rome. It is not a piece of true classic work, but neither is it Romanesque. It is transitional between the two. Whether built for pagan or for Christian use, it represents the early-Christian stage of art. The arcade, which became so characteristic of Romanesque art, is but rudely conceived, and its supports are Corinthian pilasters. The cornice is Roman, and the sharply pointed pediment shows, on a small scale, the finish of Roman basilican fronts; while, on the other hand, the round windows, like the one in the more pronouncedly classical porch at Avignon,<sup>1</sup> are innovations upon classic practice.

The Temple of St. John was undoubtedly built in the fourth century. St. Hilary may have used it; Gregory of Tours must have known it well; but by the time that the porch at Avignon was built, in the eleventh century, a new and more vital form of art had developed in this western province.

## II.

FORTUNATELY, one of the most individual and delightful of the minor churches of France still remains in excellent preservation to show us the form which, by the end of the eleventh century, the Poitevin branch of Romanesque art had assumed. Its name—Notre Dame la Grande—sounds very self-assertive, but merely means that a still smaller church, likewise dedicated to the Virgin, once stood not far away. Notre Dame la Grande is itself but a little church,—its façade is only fifty feet in breadth,—and now it is isolated in the middle of a market-place. But the market-place is also small, and the buildings about it are appropriate in scale. Rarely shall we see a happier concord between a medieval church and an environment that has been opened out in modern times; and never shall we see them enlivened by more entertaining figures than

<sup>1</sup> See "The Churches of Provence," THE CENTURY MAGAZINE, November, 1894.

swarm here during market-hours. A great mushroom-field of blue umbrellas and white-and-red awnings then spreads around Notre Dame, most thickly planted under the protection of its walls. The women wear the traditional great white caps of the district, and, as everywhere in provincial France, soft-toned blue cotton predominates in the other garments of men and women both. Awkward little rustic carts are tipped up in rows, while donkeys placidly wait for their reharnessing. And the Poitevin housewife must be very strongly bent upon buying her viands alive, for I am sure that so populous and clamorous a menagerie cannot figure as a market in any other town. The turkeys, the ducks, and the geese, the chickens and the rabbits, are past counting in their baskets and boxes and coops, and past imagining for the noise they make—all but the rabbits, of course, and these look sad of face because they cannot blow the trumpet of their toothsome-ness. Yet the inarticulate hubbub is almost drowned by human chatter, and the August sun itself does not shine more brightly than the smiles on the faces of seller and buyer. If ever you have to live by commerce in «garden sass,» take out your license in Poitiers—you would dwell among such cheerful folk, in the midst of such a pretty picture, and under the shadow of such a sumptuous and ornate, yet such a friendly-looking, little church.

A gay and pleasant church indeed is Notre Dame la Grande,—I had almost written a very jolly little church,—much decayed in some of its parts, and restored in others, but not yet ruined and not yet rebuilt, harmonious still, exceptionally pictorial, endlessly attractive. Doubtless, as the years are going by it is being renovated more and more. I am glad that I saw it while its tower and large portions of its walls still showed a cheese-like crumbliness of texture, and a wonderful blending of strong yellow and brown and blackish tones.

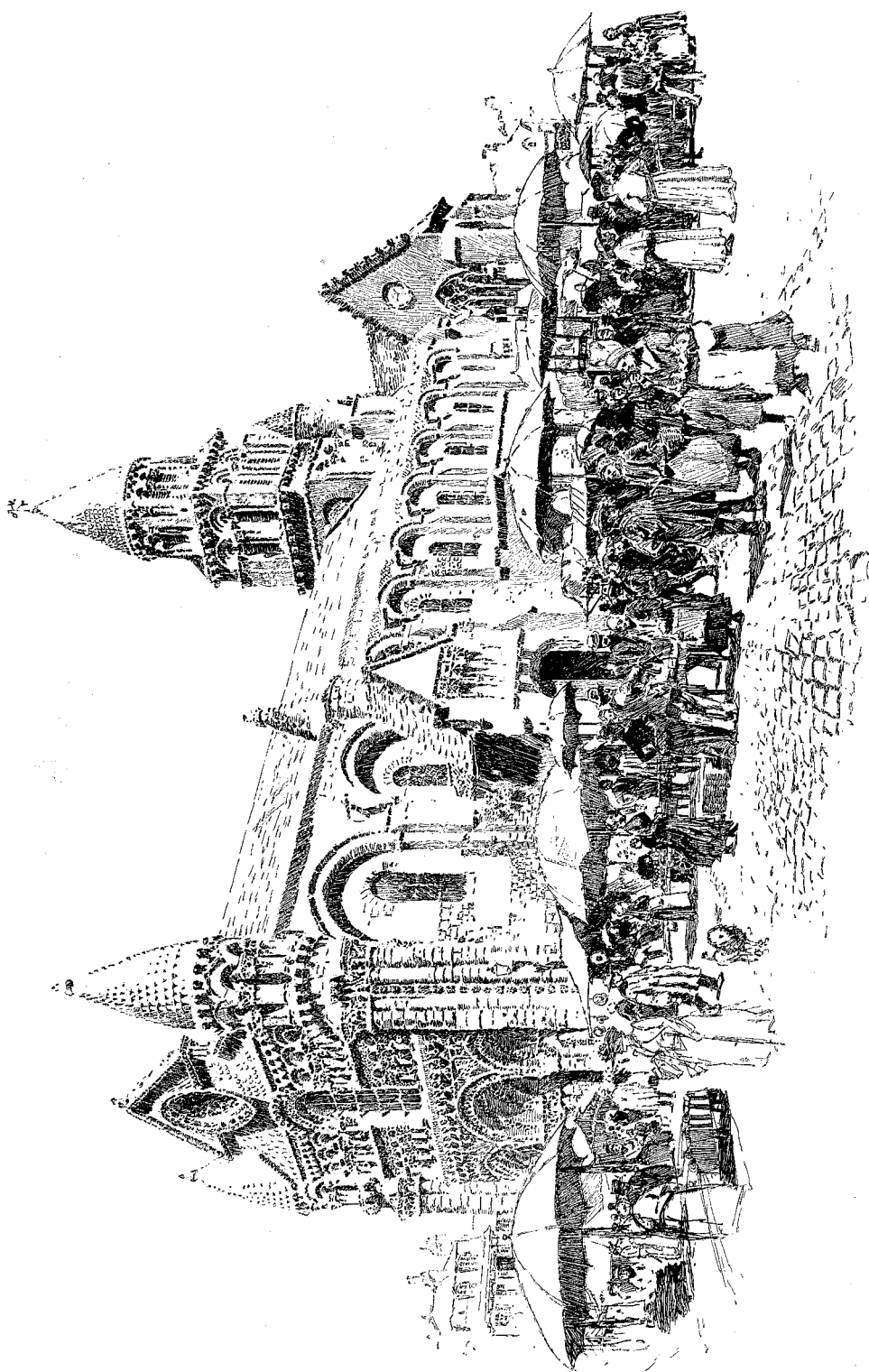
Local tradition says that the Emperor Constantine founded the first church on this site, and that St. Radegonde rebuilt it and dedicated it to the Virgin. Some fragments of very early masonry are now incorporated in its southern wall; but the record of a disastrous fire in the year 1085 assures us that its present body dates from the end of the eleventh century; and the façade and its sculptures were finished about the year 1150.

This façade is the best existing example of the type you have already seen less well achieved at Angoulême; and it clearly explains itself as a natural development from such Gallo-Roman ideas as are represented

by the crudely designed façade of the Temple of St. John. Originally its window was circular, not breaking the line of the lower arcade, and its richness was enhanced by color and gold applied to all its parts. Nevertheless, even to-day, when the paint has turned to blackish stains and many of the figures and details are modern restorations, its effect is not seriously impaired, and it teaches well an important architectural lesson. Like the Norman churches of England, it shows that the smaller his composition, the more an architect may rely upon ornament for his architectural effect. The constructional features of this façade are very few—a single doorway, a single window, two turrets, and a gable. Everything else is decoration, and decoration is everywhere, for even the uncarved field of the gable is filled with mosaic patterns. Yet the general effect is as serene and dignified as it is incredibly rich, and it is thoroughly architectural too. Enlarge such a scheme, and we should have architectural weakness with decorative redundancy; we could hardly expect to have anything better than the façade of the cathedral of Angoulême.

It might easily take you a week to decipher the meaning of all the sculptures on the front of Notre Dame la Grande; but when you had finished you would probably know more about the Bible than you do now, and more about later hagiologies than you are likely to learn in any other way. It is not, in feet and inches, so ambitious a lithic volume as the front of Angoulême; but its historical texts are better arranged and seem even more numerous, and at every step they are enriched by symbolical figures and emblems. And then, in the oval of the gable, isolated as in the heavens above the earth, Christ in Glory stands amid the signs of the four evangelists, surrounded by a choir of angels. This, as I have said before, was the usual custom: the story of humanity's struggles was crowned and emphasized by a prophecy of the judgment-day.

Examine the minor ornaments of this façade, and you will find many of a sort you have not seen in more southerly lands, except, less conspicuously used, in the analogous work at Angoulême. These are grotesque devices with oddly conceived, non-naturalistic beast-like and bird-like forms, contorted into decorative patterns, and accompanied by complex arrangements of intertwined lines. Neither Gallo-Roman art nor Byzantine art had transmitted details like these. They were used in Norman Romanesque, and



NOTRE DAME LA GRANDE, POITIERS.



long before the Normans built churches they were still more characteristic of the work that the Anglo-Saxons and the Irish and Scottish Celts produced in their island realm, and the Scandinavian ancestors of the Normans in their peninsula—in carvings on stone and wood and metal, and in illuminated manuscript borders and initials. But these peoples had no architecture of their own, and in early days architecture was literally the mother of all the arts. Where, then, did they learn such elaborate, well-balanced, imaginative patterns, or whence did they borrow them? They neither learned nor borrowed them; they had inherited them. The general idea of these decorative devices must have been among the shreds of culture which the immigrants who settled northern Europe brought from their homes in central Asia. They are the offspring of ancient Indo-European devices. We realize the fact when we study the details of the old Hindu temples of northern India.

But the Poitevin sculptor also used Byzantine and Gallo-Roman elements in his decorations, and in his figures he showed much personality of impulse. There are heads on the façade of Notre Dame la Grande which, in their realism, their fresh, distinctive, local character, seem like the creations of experienced artists. Instead, their sculptors were beginners. But they were independent artists. They had no such profusion of Roman relics to guide them as had their brethren of Provence. For this reason the general character of early Poitevin sculpture is more naïve than that of early Provencal sculpture—more barbaric in conception and arrangement, less skilful in line and grouping. But for the same reason it rose to heights of personal expressiveness, of naturalistic portraiture, to which the docile students of antique precedent could not climb.

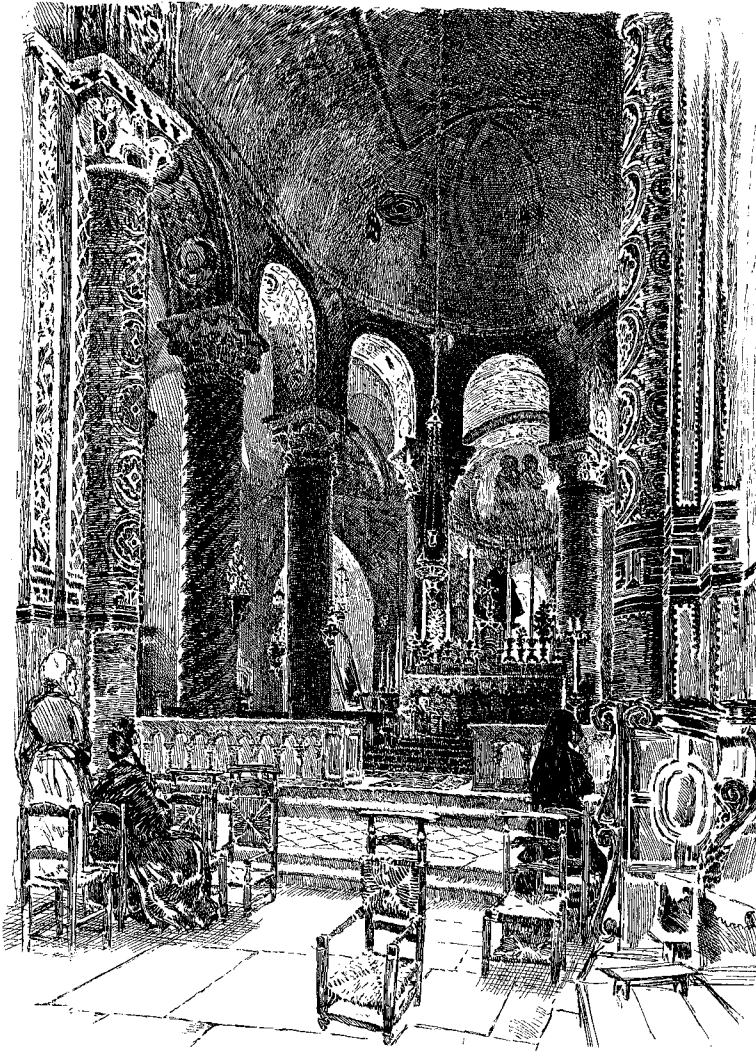
Mr. Pennell's drawings show you also the southern side and the eastern end of Notre Dame. I hope that you will particularly like the way in which, from the latter point of view, the conical and the triangular roofs build themselves up; and therefore I am sorry that Mr. Pennell thought best, in the picture on page 427, to omit the capping of the tower. It is greatly needed to complete and justify the lines beneath it. Here, and in the picture of the southern side, you will see that Gothic years did not leave this Romanesque church in peace, but in more places than the western front broke through its walls for the enlargement of its windows. And if we had a drawing of the northern side you would see

that a range of sepulchral chapels, dating from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, and showing the change from Gothic to early Renaissance art, were thrown out beyond the aisle. Their gables may be distinguished in the picture on page 427.

### III.

NOTRE DAME LA GRANDE is not among the churches, so frequent in the western part of France, which were inspired at first or second hand by the great Byzantine church at Périgueux. Yet it deviates conspicuously from the lines of the early-Christian basilicas of the West. It has no transept. Four chapels radiate from the short choir. The tower shows Byzantine influence, although not the influence of St. Front of Périgueux; like the towers on the churches of Provence, it rises above the junction of nave and choir, and its lower part is treated as a domical lantern. Provencal churches are again suggested by the very narrow aisles, almost as tall as the nave itself, and buttressing its continuous barrel-vault with their intersecting vaults. But in a typical Provencal church the nave-walls rise sufficiently high above the aisle-roofs to admit of a small clearstory, while in Notre Dame la Grande there is neither a triforium nor a clearstory stage. Light enters only through the central lantern and the windows of the aisles, and the nave is dark and gloomy, its shadows growing very dense indeed up under the curve of the ceiling. Again, pointed forms are not used in this ceiling as they were in the Romanesque barrel-vaults of Provence and the Romanesque domical vaults of Périgord and Angoumois; the vaults of Notre Dame are semicircular in section, like those of more northerly districts. Therefore it seems all the more remarkable that, outside, the great blank arches which accompany the doorway should be pointed. In this case facility in construction cannot supply a reason for the choice of the broken curve. We must suppose that the architect chose it simply to secure good relative proportions in the height and breadth of his three great arches within the given breadth of his façade.

From the beginning the interior of Notre Dame seems to have been covered with painted color. Some fragments of early frescoed figures still exist on the ceiling of the choir, and in recent years they have been supplemented by a fresh and all-embracing garment of paint. One can imagine, from the picture on page 426, how greatly such a gar-



NOTRE DAME LA GRANDE. CHOIR.

influence. But in two at least of the larger churches of Poitiers we can trace the more potent influence of the great Byzantine church of St. Front at Périgueux.

This influence seems to have been transmitted, not straight from Périgord, but by way of the province of Anjou. As Périgord lies south and Anjou north of Poitou, the fact seems strange until we remember the political condition of these western districts during the period we have now in mind. Henry II, the first of the Plantagenet rulers of England, was king of England and duke of Normandy by right of maternal descent; but he inherited wide domains from his father, the Count of Anjou, and before and above all was an

ment, if harmoniously wrought, adds to the beauty, the richness, the dignity of a church where the architectural forms are simple and the sculptured decorations few. But, alas! the present color-scheme of Notre Dame looks its best when thus translated into black and white, for it is very far indeed from being harmonious. Nowhere in our own new and untrained Western land have I seen a church interior defaced by tints so violently vulgar in themselves, or so unfortunately combined.

Alike in its constructional scheme and in the design and the lavish adornment of its front, Notre Dame la Grande represents that indigenous Romanesque art of Poitou which was developed from Gallo-Roman through early-Christian art, modified by native inventiveness, and indirectly affected by Byzantine

Angevin in deed and feeling; and through his wife he obtained control of other broad domains to the southward, including the Poitevin land. If we remember this and realize how architectural facts always reflect political and social facts, we are not surprised to learn that the Angevin, or so-called Plantagenet, style affected the art of Poitou.

It would be interesting, of course, to glance at the great churches of Angers, the headquarters of this style. But by staying instead for a moment longer in Poitiers we can see a church in which the final word of Plantagenet art, the final word of the Romanesque art of western France, was most beautifully spoken. This is St. Peter's, the cathedral church of Poitiers. Before we look at it, the very large and once magnificent,

but now deplorably injured, church of St. Radegonde demands a word.

Here we do not find again the aisles of Notre Dame la Grande. The western limb, as in the cathedral of Angoulême and also in the typical churches of Anjou, is a wide, simple space; high-placed windows rise above the tall blank arcades which enrich the walls, and the ceiling is a series of domical vaults. But these vaults were not built, like those of Angoulême, in direct imitation of the domes of St. Front. They showed the Angevin manner, which we shall find again in the cathedral ceiling. St. Radegonde is a little younger than Notre Dame. The dedication of its choir, almost always the first part of a church to be finished, took place in 1099. But this slight difference in date does not explain the great difference in plan and construction between these neighboring churches. Their relative dimensions must be taken into account. The builders of St. Radegonde, wishing to construct a much larger church than Notre Dame, and knowing how hard it was to support a barrel-vault even above an area as narrow as the nave of Notre Dame, naturally turned for help to the expedients successfully employed in recent years, and on a very large scale, by their brethren in districts near at hand.

#### IV.

If you are willing to read legend as history, you may like to know that where the cathe-

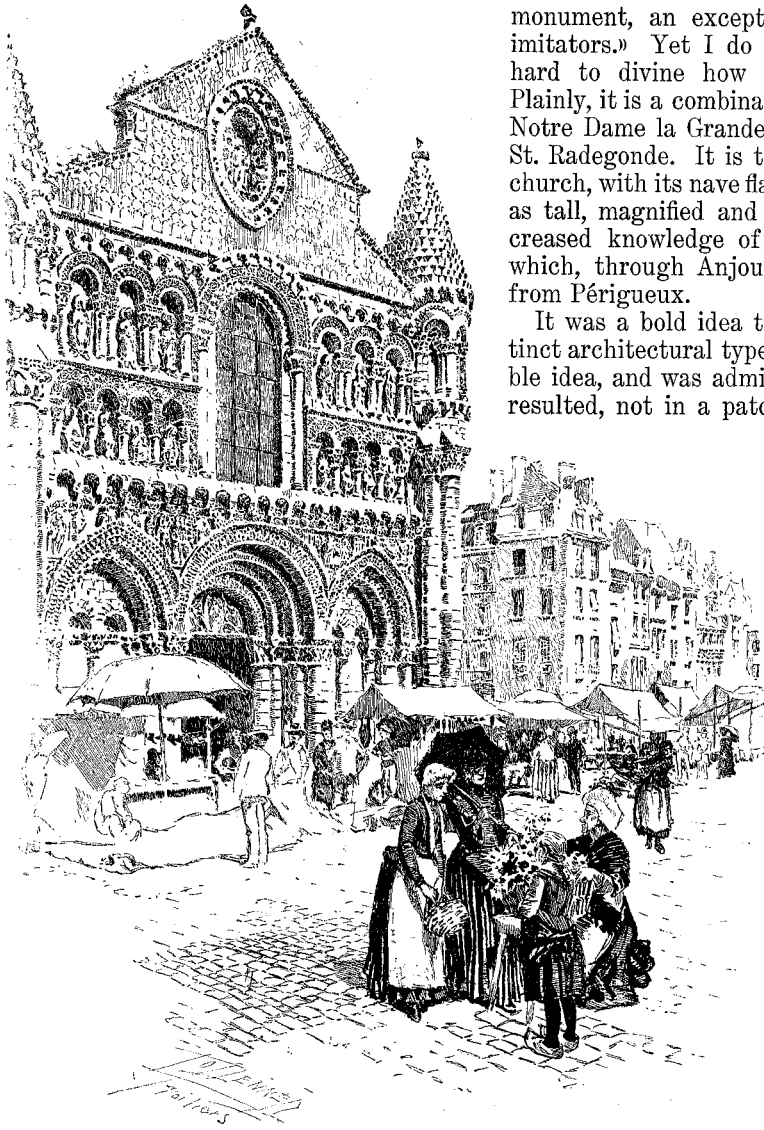
dral church now stands a Christian basilica was dedicated to St. Peter on the very day when the news of his death was brought to Poitiers. But the corner-stone of the present structure was laid by Queen Eleanor and King Henry about eighty years after Notre Dame la Grande was begun. The precise date seems to have been 1162, the year in which Henry's great adversary, Thomas Becket, was appointed to the primacy of his English realm. The construction of choir and nave was well advanced by the time of Eleanor's death in 1204. Little work, however, was done upon the façade until the fourteenth century, and for this reason (because our concern is not yet with Gothic art) I did not ask Mr. Pennell to draw it. Nor, indeed, is it a fine example of a Gothic façade, although its very defects give it a certain interest as seeming to reveal the influence of English art. In the body of the church, on the other hand, there is nothing English whatsoever. It is characteristic of the people among whom Eleanor and Henry really belonged, not of those over whom they happened to bear sway across the sea.

A plan of this church shows aisles as broad as the nave itself, and a flat east end; while the picture on page 430 explains that nave and aisles are of almost equal height. Four of the eight similar compartments form the western limb, another makes the crossing and transept, and three compose the choir. But these ecclesiological parts are not architecturally marked, except by



NOTRE DAME LA GRANDE. EAST END.





NOTRE DAME LA GRANDE. WEST FRONT.

monument, an exception which found no imitators.» Yet I do not think that it is hard to divine how it came into being. Plainly, it is a combination of the scheme of Notre Dame la Grande with the scheme of St. Radegonde. It is the local Romanesque church, with its nave flanked by aisles almost as tall, magnified and glorified by that increased knowledge of vaulting expedients which, through Anjou, had been gathered from Périgueux.

It was a bold idea thus to blend two distinct architectural types, but it was a sensible idea, and was admirably carried out. It resulted, not in a patchwork of discordant

elements, but in a new, logical, and charming type of church interior. The effect of St. Peter's is much richer and more interesting than that of any aisleless church; and as the walls are so high that the windows are very large, and as the aisles are so wide that the curve of the vaults does not darken the nave, there is none of the heaviness, the somberness, which the absence of a clearstory gives to a church like Notre Dame la Grande. The illumination of St.

Peter's is every-

where strong and equal; its expression is very spacious, open, airy, luminous. Vigorous yet slender in its fashioning, and exquisite in the design and treatment of its sculptured adornments, it is also a majestic and superb interior, with an elegance, a serenity, that recall the cathedral of Angoulême, but with a much more buoyant, cheerful, hospitable air. Without its ecclesiastical fittings it might look less like a church than like a wonderfully fine great secular hall. With these fittings the ecclesiastical accent is sufficiently strong, although, it must be confessed, St. Peter's of Poitiers appeals to a more simply human side of our appreciation than the churches of the North. It is

the slight projection of the transept as two small chapel-like arms. The whole great interior strikes the eye as a single broad and very lofty space, beautifully roofed with many dome-like vaults borne on tall, pointed arches by two longitudinal ranges of richly featured compound piers. The effect is not that of an aisled church at all. It is the effect of a church like Angoulême or St. Radegonde enlarged to such a degree that intermediate supports for the vaulting were required between the walls.

There is no other church of this kind in the city of Poitiers or the province of Poitou, and there is none in Anjou or any part of France. Viollet-le-Duc calls it «a strange



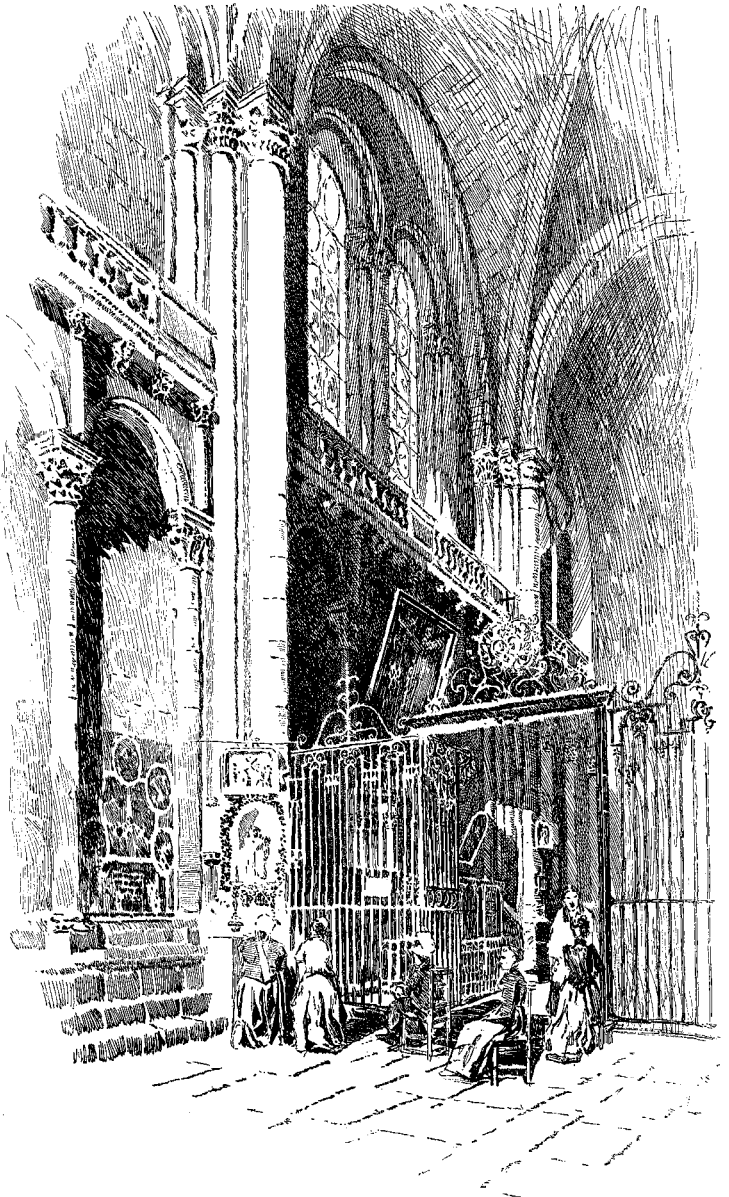
very beautiful, very admirable; but it has not the impressive, awe-inspiring aspect which, from earliest Romanesque to latest Gothic days, marked those tall, arcaded, galleried, and windowed naves, and those lower, duskier aisles more directly inspired by the basilican scheme of early-Christian days.

In the vaults of this cathedral the influence of Anjou is most distinctly read. Our pictures show that, in spite of their domical shape, they are very unlike the domes which cover the cathedral of Angoulême. There the spherical upper portion is supported by pendentives of a different curvature. Here it seems as though the pendentives themselves had been continued upward to form the cupolas; these are polygonal, not spherical, and are ribbed along the arises; and as their curves are somewhat sharply pointed, they have a certain Gothic look. But a study of their construction has shown that their ribs are merely ornamental; and of course their shape is not really that of the typical early-Gothic groined vault, as it was developing, just at this time, in Burgundy, Champagne, and the Ile-de-France. In short, we may most accurately call these vaults ribbed domes of pointed section. They are plainly descended from the true domes of St. Front, and yet they as plainly confess indebtedness to those districts where domes were never used, but where Gothic art was born.

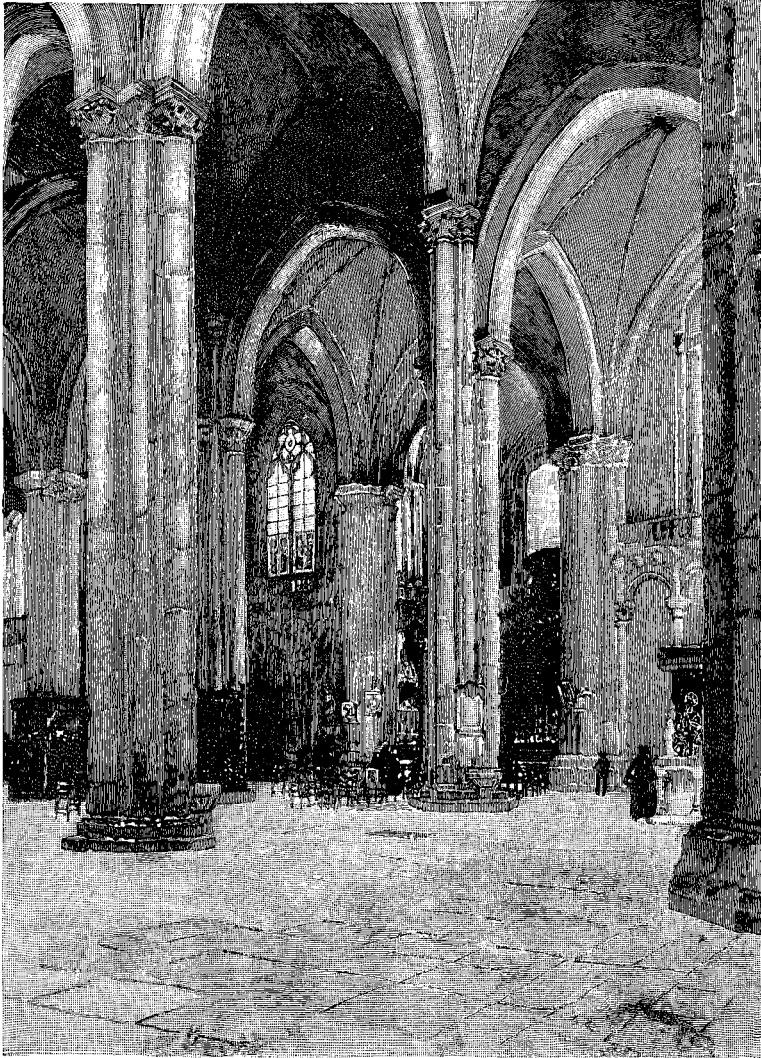
Even before the approach of this art Angevin architects had studied the ribbed intersecting Romanesque vaults of these districts — vaults which had been developed, not from Byzantine precedents,

but from the unribbed intersecting vault of the Romans; and the structural ideas which they thus discovered they amalgamated with those revealed by the Byzantine domes of St. Front. Thus the Angevin, or Plantagenet, type of vaulting was evolved, and, copied at once in Poitiers in the purely Romanesque church of St. Radegonde, it grew into the beautiful ceiling which covers the cathedral church.

This cathedral church is by no means a purely Romanesque building. Not only in its vaults, but elsewhere, the pointed arch is conspicuously employed. Yet the round arch is



CATHEDRAL OF ST. PETER, POITIERS.



ENGRAVED BY GEORGE P. BARTLE.

CATHEDRAL OF ST. PETER.

not banished, and the decoration shows an intermingling of traditional motives with those, inspired by living flowers and leafage, which were characteristic of Gothic sculpture. In short, the cathedral of Poitiers is a Transitional building. It marks the passage of the Romanesque into the Gothic style; or, more exactly, it would do this if a true Gothic style had ever developed in Poitou. But St. Peter's is not merely the last word of the Romanesque art of the province: it is the last word of its indigenous art. After its day provincial impulse died out before the architectural prowess of the conquering royal district. As the power of the King of France extended, the architectural style of the old *domaine royal* extended too. For example, the great cathedral of Limoges, which is within the Poitevin

country, might stand in Paris and not appear exotic; and it was begun about 1260, a century later than the cathedral of Poitiers, and half a century after Philippe Auguste had united Poitou to the crown of France.

## V.

If you look at the plan of the cathedral of Poitiers, you will see that to the eastward three very small apses finish the nave and aisles. But they are mere recesses in the thickness of the wall. Outside, this shows no trace of their existence; it is merely an enormous stretch of stone, almost entirely plain, surmounted by a huge plain gable. Local Romanesque architecture, as we know it, supplies no precedent for an east end like



this, nor does the architecture of Anjou; and it cannot be associated with the profusely windowed flat east ends of England, which, indeed, did not replace the Anglo-Norman apse until a somewhat later day. Unless we go very far back and connect it with the east ends of early-Christian churches, which we know had very small apses, we must call it one more peculiarity of this very peculiar church. It looks as though the architect, who proved himself so boldly and splendidly inventive in the design of the body of St. Peter's, could not manage a true apsidal termination of so great a height, and therefore, giving up the attempt really to solve the problem he had set himself, closed the east end of his church as simply as he could. Outside, the effect of a plain wall of this extent, combined with the vast single roof which sweeps over the whole breadth of the church, is prosaic, barn-like, and uncouth. But there is reason to believe that the architect meant to surmount his transept-arms with towers like those of Angoulême, and probably to build a turreted façade like that of Notre Dame la Grande. And inside the church the vast field of eastern wall has a dignified and restful look, offsetting by its serious simplicity the light and varied character of the great space where, as we change from one point of view to another, the many elaborate piers and arches perpetually fall into combinations of a novel charm.

Very beautiful are the choir-stalls of St. Peter's, carved in the thirteenth century, and the oldest anywhere preserved in France; and very interesting, outside the church, is the station of its façade. Well below the level of the street it opens on a parvis—a rectangular court encircled by a balustrade. Such inclosures, sometimes sunken as here and sometimes raised, and inherited from the atrium of the Roman basilica, often stretched in front of medieval churches, but centuries of changing customs have left few of them intact. They were designed for the celebration of certain outdoor ceremonials, but especially for the administration of justice. Here lay penitents of various kinds made public confession of their sins, and ecclesiastics, safe from the secular arm, were pilloried or otherwise disciplined by the arm of the Church herself.

Looking still again at the plan of St. Peter's, you will see that the walls of the choir trend gradually inward toward the east. But you were not meant to notice this fact when you stand within the church itself, or to notice that each successive vaulting com-

partment of the choir, in the central alley and in the aisles as well, drops a little below the one to the westward of it, so that height and breadth diminish together. The intention was simply to augment the natural action of the laws of perspective: to force the lines of walls and ceiling more quickly toward their common vanishing-point, and thus to make the church seem larger than it is. This curious method of architectural juggling seems to have been imitated from one or more of the great churches of Anjou. If you study it standing in the choir and looking westward, the ingenuity of its construction will scarcely reconcile you to the awkwardness of its effect. But this is not the point of view that you were meant to take, and from the nave the architect's mendacities certainly produce, to some degree, the effect that he intended, while the beauty of his ceiling is not palpably impaired. Indeed, from this point of view you are not likely to suspect the existence of any mendacities at all.

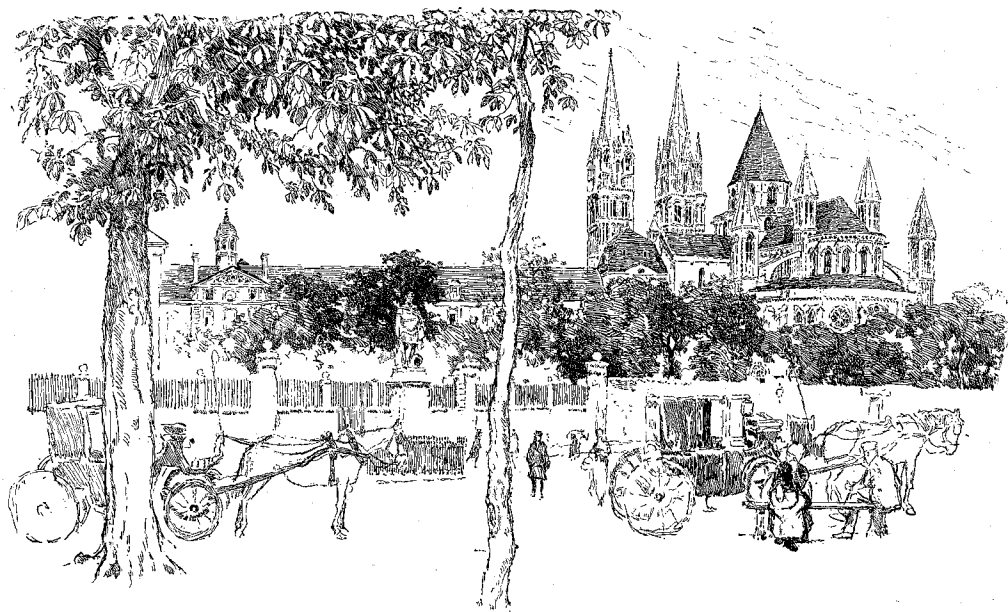
I should like to show you some of the beautiful Romanesque church towers for which the land of Poitou is renowned; but it is more important now to set a Northern type of Romanesque church in contrast with the Southern types among which we have thus far traveled. So we will cross the Loire and the land of Anjou, and enter the country of the Normans.

## VI.

A NEW race meets us in Normandy; a new ethnographical influence shows in its art. Here, as everywhere in Gaul, the Celt, the Roman, and the Teutonic Frank mingled their diverse strains of blood. But these northern regions were not so thoroughly Romanized, or so well endowed with classic works of art, as more southerly ones; and later the Franks settled less numerous in the northwestern than in the northeastern parts of their new Gallic domain. Therefore, in Normandy the rebirth of civilization was accomplished even more slowly than elsewhere, and history tells us little of the times which preceded the arrival of the race to which its modern name is due.

For a century these Scandinavian marauders had been desolating the shores of the Gallic lands, and carrying slaughter and pillage even into their central portions, when, in the year 912, one of their leaders, Rolf, was formally granted possession of a rich northern tract, with Rouen as its capital, which he already held by force of arms. And soon all the northerly districts as far as





ST. STEPHEN'S—ABBAYE-AUX-HOMMES, CAEN. EAST END.

Brittany were annexed to this new Norman duchy, while the ownership of Brittany itself was claimed.

But rapidly the Northmen were conquered by the people whom they had subdued. Their old religion was abandoned, their Teutonic tongue was utterly forgotten, their laws and customs and manners were assimilated to those of their neighbors. The barbaric Northman disappeared, the civilized Norman took his place; and this Norman became thoroughly a Frenchman. Yet he was a definite, peculiar kind of Frenchman. The individuality of the fresh, strong strain of Northern blood did not die out, and it speaks from architectural no less than from political history.

The Northmen brought no architectural traditions with them in their high-peaked galleys; but they quickly learned all that more civilized folk could teach, gave it an impress of their own, and became the most energetic and ambitious builders of the Romanesque time. From that early-Christian form of art which was virtually the same in all parts of western Europe, they developed in Normandy a Romanesque style of pronounced personality and extraordinary force. This they carried into England, using it there even more splendidly than at home; and when they turned southward and conquered Sicily they amalgamated it with the Saracenic style, and along this novel path worked as boldly, and individually, as at the North.

As an architectural district the true Norman land extends from the Seine westward beyond the borders of Brittany, and from the North Sea and the Channel southward to the borders of Anjou; and its most instructive Romanesque monuments stand in William the Conqueror's city of Caen.

By comparison with Arles and Avignon, or even with Périgueux and Poitiers, Caen is a modern town. Romans may have lived upon its site, but we know nothing about them, and it was merely a bit of a village when its name was first recorded, in the year 1006. It was really created by the great William half a century later. He made it his favorite residence and the second capital of Normandy, and in its outskirts he and his wife Matilda founded the two monasteries, one for monks and one for nuns, which the pope commanded them to build in expiation of the sin they had committed by marrying within the degrees of kinship forbidden by the church.

Caen lies snugly and prettily in the heart of that lovely, green and rolling, English-looking Norman land which is better known to Americans than any other part of France. Within its borders three small streams unite to form the river Orne, and spacious basins, with a wide canal running to the coast, make it an inland port of considerable importance. It has only some forty thousand indwellers—about ten thousand more than the towns we have recently seen; yet somehow it appears much larger, more consequential, less provincial and remote. Its principal streets

look quite sumptuously modern; for their chief secular buildings, many in number and often very fine in kind, date from Renaissance days. And as we walk any of the streets of Caen we realize how persistent are race characteristics. Even to-day the Norman is not like other Frenchmen. He is bigger and blonder and ruddier; he is more reserved, more steady, less impulsive, less voluble; and by nature he is a seafarer still. In truth, he is still largely a Northman, and when we know him to-day we cease to wonder at the personality of the art he produced upon Gallic soil when he stood eight centuries nearer to his Scandinavian home.

The history of Caen is varied and stirring, and its churches are many and delightful. But we tarried a long while in Poitiers, and must now confine ourselves to the two churches that William and Matilda built—St. Stephen's, in the great group of monastic structures which he called the *Abbaye-aux-Hommes*, and Trinity, in the one which she called the *Abbaye-aux-Dames*. The conventual buildings that once covered acres of ground, walled in and fortified like separate little towns, have utterly disappeared; but the churches still stand entire, although by no means altogether as their first creators left them.

#### VII.

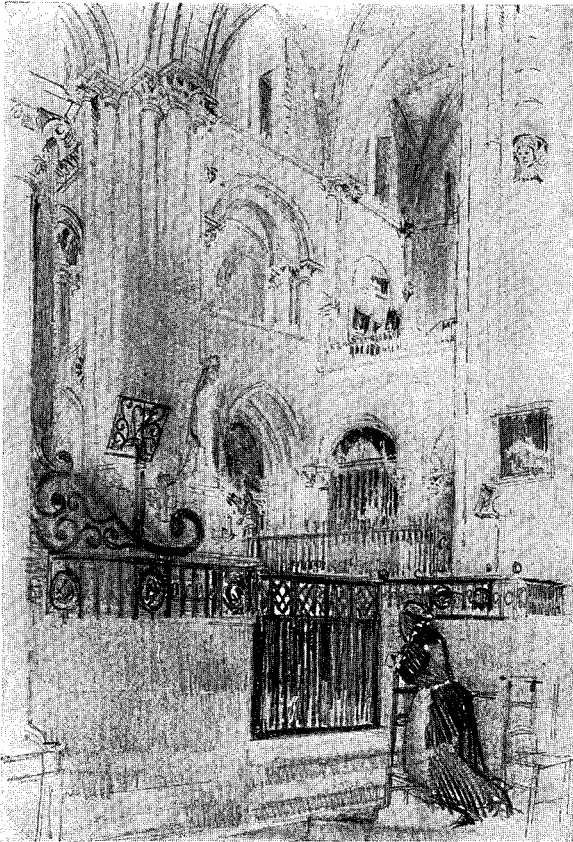
I HAVE previously said that the true Romanesque styles did not develop from early-Christian art until the advent of that great political, intellectual, and moral renaissance which followed upon the year 1000. And even then the development was a little tardy in the province that Scandi-

navian settlers had made their own. Norman architecture was hardly born before the middle of the eleventh century, and the two great abbey-churches of Caen are among its earliest large monuments. They were begun about the year 1063, and Matilda's was dedicated in 1066, two months before William sailed for the conquest of England. But only its choir was then complete, and the rest of the work upon it lagged behind the work on St. Stephen's; for, with



ST. STEPHEN'S. WEST FRONT.





ST. STEPHEN'S. TOMB OF WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR.

the exception of the upper part of the western towers, this was finished when William arranged its pompous consecration in the year 1077—finished with a rapidity which amazes us even when recorded of such amazingly energetic builders as the Normans always were.

Byzantine influence did not affect the ground-plan of Norman churches, or the general character of their constructional scheme. They took from the early-Christian basilica its Latin-cross plan, its low aisles, its large triforium, and its tall clearstory amply lighting the broad nave. Under Northern skies this was a much better scheme than one which relied for illumination upon aisle-windows and a central lantern only. But its retention meant that until the twelfth century merely the apse and the aisles of Norman churches were vaulted with stone, while in the nave the pier-shafts usually ran straight up to the top of the clearstory wall, forming supports for cross-beams to the lower surface of which a flat wooden ceiling was nailed. A ceiling like this, or an open timber roof, could be supported by the tall nave-

walls, but a barrel-vault of stone needed the buttressing supplied by high-placed aisle-vaults such as those that we have seen in the Romanesque churches of Provence and in Notre Dame la Grande at Poitiers; and even thus it was difficult to build it securely on any extended scale.

But the Norman Romanesque church showed points where the early-Christian basilican scheme was expanded or improved upon. The choir was lengthened, and its semicircular apse was enlarged, although without the addition of the radiating chapels common in the Romanesque work of many other districts; the projecting narthex, or porch, was replaced by a great vestibule incorporated with the western front. And in this front we find, very simply and plainly treated, the type afterward so gloriously developed by Gothic architects—three portals, a windowed wall supporting a central gable, and two great towers with lofty spires. In the nude severity of the façade of St. Stephen's at Caen lie latent the serene magnificence of the façade of Notre Dame in Paris, and the elaborate splendor

of the fronts of the cathedrals of Amiens and of Rheims.

Nor was the Norman architect wholly unaffected by Byzantine influence. The fact that he always built a massive tower over the crossing of his nave and transept, and always left its lower stage open to the church beneath as a windowed lantern, tells, of course, of his acquaintance with the domical lanterns of southerly districts; and the stuffs and carvings of the Orient furnished him with many ornamental motives.

Let us look first at William's church, St. Stephen's. It is not as large as many Norman churches afterward built in England. Nevertheless, it is very big. Its massiveness is commensurate with its size. Its beautiful masonry tells of the practical, thoroughgoing spirit of its creators. And their strong, stern nature is revealed by the substitution of massive rolls and hollows for the simple, classic-looking, square-sectioned moldings of the South, and by the sparse amount and the vigorous yet unimaginative character of their decorative work.

Classic remains did not teach figure-sculp-

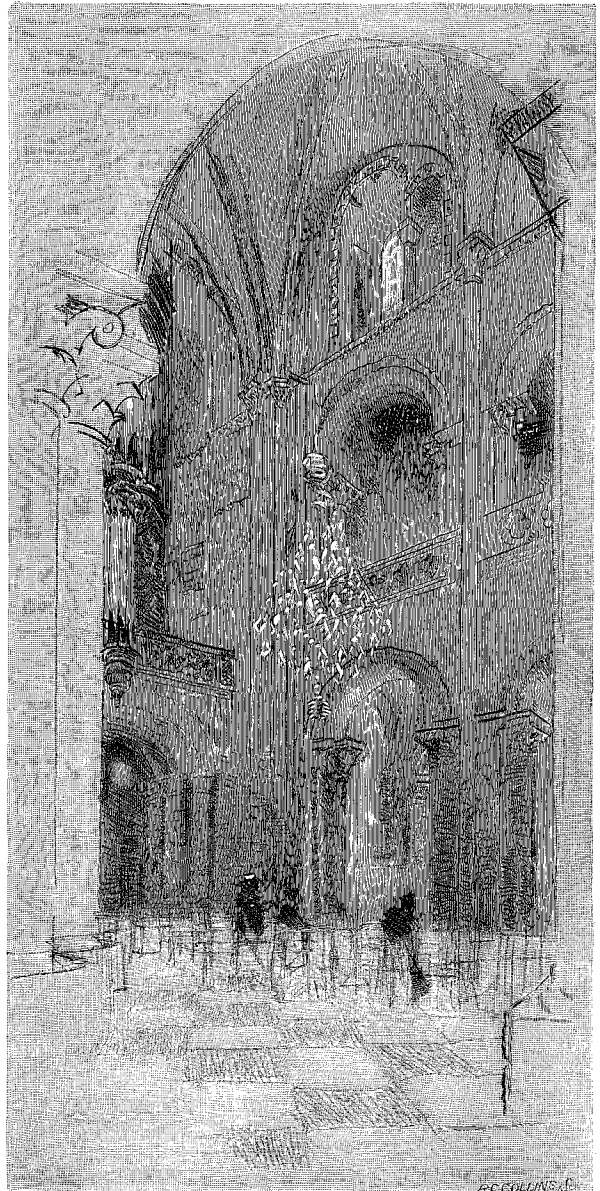


ture on this far-away soil, and the Normans never developed an aptitude for it, although they had the same help which sufficed for the sculptors of the *domaine royal* and the central districts of France—the help of the figures on Byzantine manuscripts and portable carvings. Norman sculptured figures are very small, and form an integral part of the decorative patterns; and even leafage motives are sparingly employed. Norman ornaments are almost altogether geometrical. At first they were of the simplest sort—zigzags, billets, nail-heads, rolls, and coarse imitations of the Greek fret. Nor was there any of the delicate refinement of Southern manipulation; the patterns were heavily designed, boldly, deeply, and even rudely cut. Later there was more delicacy and more richness, but still along geometrical lines, Byzantine motives mingling with those grotesque interlacings which, as I have said, were the only real contribution of the far North to medieval art. The favorite early forms for capitals were a cushion form, unknown in the districts we have hitherto seen, and a crudely voluted form—barbaric translations of the Doric and Ionic capitals of classic times; and when more elaborate types were evolved their effect was somewhat barbaric still.

The great vaults which now cover the nave of St. Stephen's were built early in the twelfth century to replace the original flat wooden ceiling, and the balustrade of the triforium gallery is still later in date. In many other features, too, the nave has been retouched or reconstructed; yet it still fairly represents the one that William built, and the transept is in a similar case. But late in the twelfth century the choir was rebuilt, most likely to do honor to William's sepulcher. The style had then become early Gothic, yet of a distinctively Norman kind. The triforium preserves its old Romanesque importance and the semi-circular shape of the arch; the rectangular chapels which flank the choir proper, and the semi-circular ones which surround the apse, are all included under a single stretch of roof, as you may see

from the drawing on page 432; and only in a Norman design would you find the slender turrets which spring above this roof. The ornate spires of the western towers also date from the twelfth century, while the central tower, reconstructed in the thirteenth century, was again renewed in Renaissance times—singularly enough, in imitation of its medieval aspect.

Matilda's church has been less conspicuously altered. Here the choir is still the one that was consecrated in 1066. It has no true aisle or triforium gallery, but its apse is en-



ENGRAVED BY R. C. COLLINS.

ST. STEPHEN'S. NAVE.

circled by a two-storied colonnade, with richly conceived yet rudely executed capitals, forming a sort of narrow passage around the wall. Beneath lies a five-aisled crypt, with low vaults borne by ranges of stumpy columns, which seems like a crude prophecy of the rich and slender late-Norman Galilee Chapel in Durham Cathedral.

The choir of Trinity is now the place of worship for a house of nuns who tend a great modern hospital, while the nave is used as a parish church. Therefore the one is now completely walled off from the other, and Mr. Pennell was permitted to make no drawings in the choir. On page 438, however, he shows you Trinity's nave. Later than the choir, and later than St. Stephen's nave, — probably not finished until after the year 1100, — it is also more exceptional in design. St. Stephen's shows the usual Norman type of triforium. The nearest approach to Trinity's type of which I know is the early-Gothic nave of Wells Cathedral in England.<sup>1</sup>

A spire of wood much taller than the present one originally covered the central tower of Trinity, and the pointed windows of its upper stage were inserted during the thirteenth century. The cappings on the western towers date only from the eighteenth century; the old ones, with the spires above them, were destroyed by Duguesclin, for strategical reasons, while he was warring against the English. Otherwise the façade of Trinity reveals the original design, although with numerous restorations. Being later and more richly developed than St. Stephen's, it is still more interesting, for its unlikeness to the contemporary façades of Southern districts is just as apparent, while its prophecy of the splendors of Gothic fronts is more distinct.

The exterior of a typical Norman church won a special grandeur from the number, the importance, and the rich character of its towers. No other province learned so soon to build such fine ones, and no other retained the central one so long. Elsewhere it disappeared or dwindled to a spirelet as the body of the church grew tall in Gothic times; but when the Norman borrowed Gothic schemes and forms from his neighbors of the domaine royal, he was less enamoured of very lofty interiors, and therefore could preserve his central towers. We know how they persisted in England, where the whole course

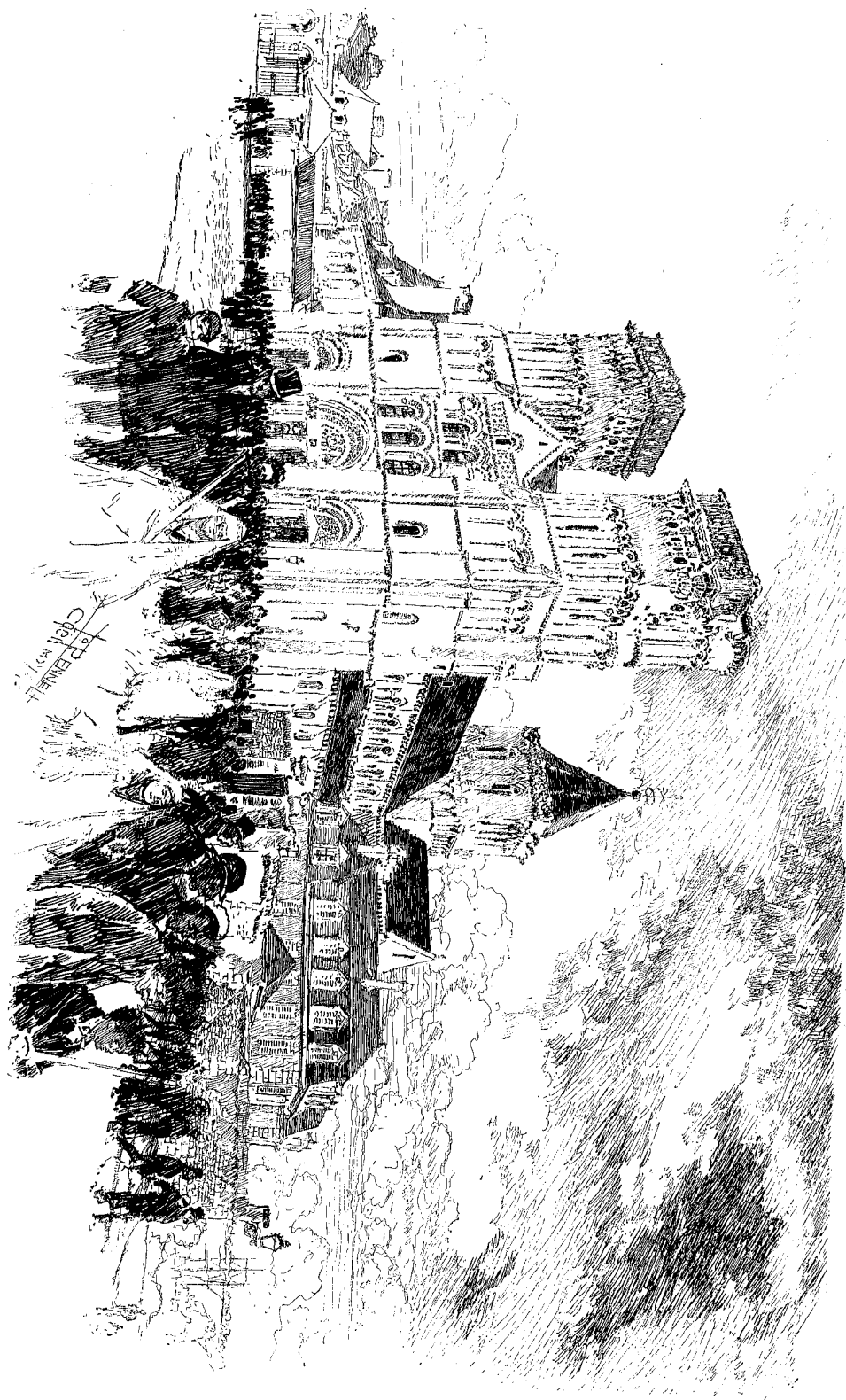
of architectural history was determined by Norman beginnings—growing, indeed, more and more majestic as Gothic art developed, until at last, in the Perpendicular period, they throned immensely over cathedral churches which bore no western towers at all. And the Gothic cathedral at Coutances, the finest in Normandy itself, shows a group of three great towers as distinctively Norman as the group on St. Stephen's at Caen. Such words as might be used of the people of Normandy describe the temper of its mediæval art as well: after a period of semi-independence it became part and parcel of the national art of the great kingdom of France, yet always, to a very marked degree, it remained provincial in the best and proudest meaning of the term.

These Norman Romanesque churches are grander and more virile than their contemporaries of the South. And if you think them less interesting because less peculiar, this merely means that they form a more integral part of that long chain of architectural development which, beginning with the simple pagan basilica, ended in the Gothic magnificence of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Therefore historical interest is greater in Normandy than at the South, and it is augmented by the fact that few important Romanesque churches remain in the true French district. During the Romanesque period the King of France was engaged in such a bitter struggle with many rebellious fiefs and rival sovereignties that architectural energy could not be fostered within his personal domains as it could upon the lands of some of his opponents. And, on the other hand, when his banners triumphed from sea to sea, this energy developed with such splendid enthusiasm and power that, while great French Gothic churches sprang up in every conquered district,—absolutely French, as at Limoges, or modified, as at Coutances,—almost all the earlier work which existed on his ancestral soil was swept away to make room for finer things. Therefore we must turn elsewhere to get a good idea of the Romanesque art from which Gothic art developed; and Normandy is very important from this point of view. Its Romanesque work was akin to that of the Ile-de-France: it was lavishly produced on a splendid scale; and much of it has been very well preserved.

#### VIII.

In the year 1083 Queen Matilda was magnificently entombed in the choir of her conven-

<sup>1</sup> This analogy is noticed in my book on «English Cathedrals»; and there I have explained the controlling influence of Norman Romanesque upon English Gothic art more fully than is possible or desirable here.



TRINITY — ABBAYE-AUX-DAMES, CAEN.



tual church. In 1562 Protestant hands pillaged her resting-place. Reinterred and, in 1709, placed in a new sepulcher, her bones were again profaned in 1793; and now they lie in a still more modern tomb. Yet into one of its sides is built a slab from the first tomb of all, bearing the original epitaph in stately Latin hexameters.

In the choir of William's church you may also read his epitaph, likewise in Latin, but as modern hands have written it:

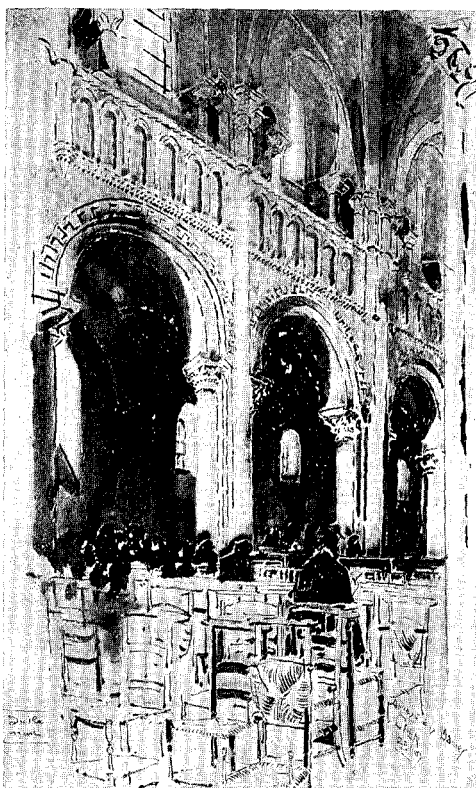
HERE IS SEPULTURED THE INVINCIBLE WILLIAM,  
CONQUEROR, DUKE OF NORMANDY AND KING OF  
ENGLAND, OF THIS HOUSE THE FOUNDER, WHO DIED  
IN THE YEAR 1087.

As you read these words, as you look around upon William's great and massive house, as you remember the still more tremendous houses of God which he made it possible for his kith and kin to build in a new realm across the sea, as you think of all the enemies he subdued and all the friends and allies he controlled, of all the terrible evil and all the excellent good he wrought, his image, against the background of the hoary stones he placed, defines, solidifies, and explains itself. You recognize the image of one of the chief among men, of one whose personal seal was set, not upon his own time only, but, in two great countries, upon times that have not yet expired. It is indeed a mighty and imposing shape. Solemn and soul-subduing,—a traveler from another planet, not knowing the character of ours, would confidently say,—reverential and nobly tragical, must have been the closing scenes when this man's spirit returned to the Maker whom his lips had so loudly professed to honor, and his body was committed to the keeping of the earth which his feet had so magnificently trod.

But there is nothing for which an eye that does know our planet can less confidently look than for appropriate endings to the lives of men. Least of all can it expect them when great rulers are in question: it has read too often of an Alexander, a Caesar, a Napoleon, a Henry of Navarre, a William of Orange, a Lincoln. No one drew fatal daggers against William of Normandy, and no one was able to fetter and confine him. But you have heard how the sons of his own body turned against him, and once even his beloved Matilda; how deadly weakness assailed his giant frame, and the mere misstep of a horse was its destruction; how, when he died in Rouen, the great men and the small who had thronged to his chamber fled, each

man his own way, to make sure of personal profit; and how his body was left for a time abandoned, and only a single knight with a few men-at-arms at last consented to bear it to its burial in Caen.

As his funeral passed through the streets of Caen, toward the portal of St. Stephen's, a great fire broke out in the town, and the procession scattered in terror—all but the faithful servitors of the Church. Then, when these pronounced their eulogy while William lay uncovered before the high altar, and called upon their hearers to forgive any sin he might have committed against them, the voice of a burgher cried out in protest: the



TRINITY. NAVE.

land upon which St. Stephen's stood was his—William had never paid for it—William should not rest within it until payment had been made. The service was stopped, sixty shillings were given as the price of the grave itself, and a larger sum was promised for the remainder of the site. But even this was not all: the stone coffin had been made too narrow; the huge and bloated corpse burst under the pressure of impatient hands, and despite the clouds of sweet incense in the church, William's horrified subjects fled a third time

from his posthumous presence. It seems almost trivial to add that when Matilda's grave was desecrated by the Protestants, William's was desecrated too, and that his bones were lost, with the exception of a single leg-bone, which now lies under the proud epitaph, and, an old writer has recorded, is «longer by the length of about four fingers than those of a very big man.»

A pitiful, a pitiable, a dreadful story! Why cannot one forget it in the great church of William the Great? Perhaps you may when it comes your turn to stand there. But I could not. It was too curiously, too dramatically suggested by the atmosphere and the aspect of the place in the hour when I first saw it.

It was a late October twilight hour, but clearly gray in the streets and squares, and we were glad to find the doors of William's abbey-church still open. Inside its massiveness, however, there was a gray and somber gloom—such broad, thick shadows, and such narrow gleams of pallid light, that the vast spaces looked as though filled with vapor or smoke. Many interiors would have been obliterated by this duskiness, and we should merely have wished that we might see them better. But these huge, plain piers, these simple and titanic arches, were but greater, grander, more tremendous than in vivid daylight, defining themselves in spite of the obscurity, as though built by more than mortal hands. Half concealed, yet colossally apparent, they seemed to form a church for ghosts to pray in—for ghosts imperial, like that of a duke who had won himself a kingdom across a foreign sea. No steps but ours

profaned the gigantic solitude; no other eyes explored it. The silence was as dense as the gloom, and, like the gloom, it seemed to grow denser as each moment passed. And then, when we entered the choir, behold! it was all hung with black draperies bordered with glimmering bands of white; and behind the high altar towered a great catafalque, with its white-edged sable covers widely sweeping the floor. There were no watchers and no candles, and so we knew that the body for which this bier had been prepared was not yet upon it. But the effect was all the more awesome. One could fancy a preparation, not for the material body of some mere modern man, some prosaic little burgher of the modern town of Caen, but for the ghostly corpse of the long-dead warrior who created Caen. More and more the whole place seemed like a place in a terrific dream, growing momentarily darker, stiller, indistincter—fading away as a dream fades, but into thick blackness, not thin and luminous air. And more and more the spirit of William, the Conqueror whom death disgraced, seemed to pervade it—coming to show that even death in such a form had not subdued him, coming to be consoled in this enormous and majestic solitude, on this peaceful, shadowy bier, for the hideous turmoil and contumely of his actual interment eight hundred years before.

This was my first impression of the Conqueror's church, carried hastily, almost in terror, through its portal into the glooming street. And I hardly remember how St. Stephen's looked in after days and brighter hours.

*M. G. Van Rensselaer.*

«I HAVE CALLED THEE MANY A NIGHT.»

I HAVE called thee many a night,  
While the rest were sleeping;  
Thou wert deaf to all I said,  
Heedless of my weeping.

Wilt thou never hear again,  
Howsoe'er I pray thee?  
Then must I go forth to seek,  
On thy way waylay thee.

Shall I find, beyond the sun,  
Some Celestial Garden?  
Shall I kneel there at thy feet,  
Clamor for thy pardon?

Nay; how can I wait so long?  
Wilt thou not draw near me?  
Wingèd winds are steeds of thine—  
Let them hither bear thee.

Long my ear waits for thy words.  
How can I forego thee?  
Ah! for one brief hour come back,  
Let me see and know thee.

*Lowise Chandler Moulton.*