

## THE ABBÉ COCHET.

By C. ROACH SMITH, F.S.A.

THUS soon, after my brief notice of M. de Caumont,<sup>1</sup> am I called upon to record the death of another of the eminent archæologists of France, a pupil in some respects, of M. de Caumont; but of more specific tendencies; not taking so wide a range in his studies; but with indomitable perseverance, exhausting the subjects he took in hand with full analytical research; leaving, like the illustrious Director of the Société Française d'Archéologie, a permanent monument of his services to history and archæology in his published works. In England he was more widely known than M. de Caumont. Introduced by his colleagues here, as Foreign Member to the Society of Antiquaries, the Royal Archæological Institute, and the British Archæological Association, he did not rest contented with the appointment as a compliment to his merit; but he maintained a constant correspondence; and the "Archæologia" and "Proceedings" of the Society of Antiquaries while they proclaim his worth, indicate what important services would be rendered to international archæology by the enlistment of men who like the Abbé Cochet would be active, and not merely nominal Foreign Members.

Many years ago, I gave a *résumé* of the researches of our lamented friend and colleague<sup>2</sup> in the valley of the Eaulne, at Londinières, at Douvrend, and at Envermeu, where he excavated three important Frankish cemeteries; and in the true spirit of science, laid promptly before the world, without reserve, the results of his labours, marked with that comprehensive discernment and truthfulness which form so striking and pleasing a feature in all his publications. In some of his explorations, as at Lillebonne; and in the neighbourhood of Eu where, not long since, the vestiges of a Roman town were brought to light, we may wish for more

<sup>1</sup> "Arch. Journ.," vol. xxxi., p. 360.

<sup>2</sup> "Collectanea Antiqua," vol. ii., p. 205 *et seq.*

extended information ; yet it is probable, that, with a view to the utility of division of labour, he purposely left architectural remains to his immediate colleagues, confining himself to the sepultures of various epochs ; to a careful and exhaustive examination of the graves and their contents. In the accomplishment of this self-imposed and important task, he was so successful that he will ever stand pre-eminent among not only the antiquaries of Normandy, but of France itself.

The alliance of the Abbe Cochet with Mr. Wylie, the late John Yonge Akerman, and myself, was productive of the best consequences. There was a constant exchange of the results of researches of the greatest mutual advantage. While we were working, and gaining aid from a few earnest and intelligent men, such as the late Lord Braybrooke, and from the excavations of Bryan Faussett made accessible by Mr. Joseph Mayer, in fixing the archæology of the Anglo-Saxon period, Lindenschmit was doing the same for the Ripuarian and Allamannic period in Germany ; and Cochet for the Merovingian in France. Our joint labours and mutual comparisons resulted in a perfect elucidation of the early general Teutonic archæology. With Mr. Wylie and myself, Cochet was especially connected ; and to us were communicated freely all his discoveries, by letters which count by hundreds ; by the journals of Dieppe and Rouen, which were usually kept *au courant* with his labours ; and by his voluminous volumes enshrining his matured conclusions, aided by illustrations to which were added for comparison reproductions from English works, and especially from the "Collectanea Antiqua."<sup>3</sup> In the second volume of this work, as before stated, I have written at considerable length on the Abbé's earliest excavations ; some few years before he published his "La Normandie Souterraine." A comparison of the two volumes, as well as of the "Sépultures Gauloises," etc., will show the extent to which he adopted some of my views and types of Anglo-Saxon and Frankish

<sup>3</sup> Although it may seem a matter of no importance I cannot refrain from correcting a mistake in the last issued part of the "Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries," p. 378. It is there stated in reference to a very remarkable mosaic stud given in "La Normandie Souterraine," pl. xv., fig. 4, that "this is reproduced in

Mr. Roach Smith's 'Collectanea,' iii., p. 217." This is a mistake, as a comparison of the two will prove. I sketched the stud, together with several other precious objects, from the originals in the Museum of Rouen, soon after they had been deposited there by the Abbe Cochet.

remains used by me for comparison. And the same with the works of Mr. Wylie, Mr. Akerman, the "*Inventorium Sepulchrale*," etc. It is one of the highest compliments that could be paid to archæology in England, while, at the same time, it demonstrates the enlightened zeal and activity of our friend. For us, unhappily, his letters were almost entirely illegible. His handwriting is, I think, the worst of the many bad specimens I have been doomed to despair of.

Perhaps no practical archæologist has worked more continuously, more energetically, and more successfully than Cochet, and no one has turned the results of his researches more promptly to good account. Conscientious and truth seeking, he worked for science ; and did not withhold from the public the facts and the knowledge he acquired. The admirable spirit in which he laboured cannot be better shown than in his own words, the declaration of his archæological faith :—"Many imagine, including my own labourers, that I dig in the earth for treasure. They take me for a Californian adventurer, who not having the courage to emigrate from France to California, would transport California into France. In their eyes I am a magician, who has learned from the stars, or old books and writings, the mysterious existence of concealed treasures. Others, more numerous, think that if I search in the earth it is to find vases, arms, coins, and other precious things. But it is nothing at all of the kind that I seek for. To speak the truth, when a beautiful object comes out of the earth, when something important is revealed by the pickaxe or the spade, I am not indifferent ; but once taken from the earth, to me they lose half their value ; and when they have been well studied, I deposit them all with pleasure in a public collection ; and resign myself to see them, perhaps, no more.

"What I search for in the bosom of the earth is a thought. That which I seek for at each stroke of the workman is an idea. That which I am anxious to collect is not so much a vase or a coin, as a line of the past, written in the dust of time, a sentence on ancient manners ; funereal customs ; Roman or barbarian industry ; it is truth that I would surprise in the bed where it has been laid by the witnesses of twelve, fifteen, or eighteen hundred years ago. I would willingly give all the objects possible for a revelation of this kind. Vases, coins, jewels, have only price and value, when

they reveal the name and talent of the artist ; the character and genius of a people ; in one word, the lost page of an extinct civilisation. This especially would I seek in the bosom of the earth. I would read there as in a book : thus I interrogate the least grain of sand ; the smallest stone ; the most fugitive *debris* ; I demand of them the secret of ages and of men ; the life of nations, and the mysteries of the religion of peoples."

In 1853, Mr. Wylie communicated to the Society of Antiquaries a Paper on certain sepulchral usages of Early Christian times.<sup>4</sup> These were the practices of depositing in the tombs formulæ of absolution engraved on crosses of lead ; and also the interment of vessels containing holy water and charcoal. Evidences of the former customs had been found in England ; but not of the latter. Crosses in the public library of Dieppe had attracted Mr. Wylie's attention, and the Abbé Cochet assisted him in obtaining copies of the inscriptions. These superstitions had no doubt descended from Pagan times ; but until Mr. Wylie's Paper, no one in this country had investigated the interesting subject ; neither in France, where examples of the funereal vessels occurred not unfrequently, had any especial attention been given to the discoveries. The Abbé Cochet, inspired probably by the interesting Paper of his colleague, set to work with his usual ardour and intelligence, and soon succeeded in classifying chronologically the vessels found in Christian sepultures, and in accumulating a larger number of examples from the eleventh to the seventeenth century. He does full justice to his predecessors, who had written incidentally on the matter, but only in general terms. This chapter is one of the most novel and successful in his "*Sépultures Gauloises, Romaines, Franques, et Normandes*," published in 1857, as a supplement to "*La Normandie Souterraine*." Preceding this is a chapter on the Cross of Absolution placed upon the bodies of the dead in the Middle Ages, in Normandy, in France, and in England. It embodies Mr. Wylie's in the "*Archæologia*," and contains many new examples. It is equal in interest with the other.

To say that the Abbe Cochet now and then made mistakes

<sup>4</sup> "*Archæologia*," vol. xxxv., p. 298.

is not to disparage his abilities. Errors in judgment are to be expected in all earnest and laborious workers in science who outstrip their contemporaries, and upon whom crowd a multiplicity of facts demanding the greatest care and circumspection, patient study, sifting, and arrangement. In 1857 he communicated to the Society of Antiquaries, through Mr. Akerman, "Notes on the interment of a young Frankish warrior discovered at Envermeu" ("Archæologia," vol. xxxvii., p. 102). With the skeleton were a pair of ear-rings; beads; a long hair-pin (supposed a stylus); an elegant purse-clasp; a knife; buckles; the head of a small javelin; tusks of the boar; buttons and other appendages to a belt. Cochet decides that the interment is that of a male. But Mr. Wylie, in summing up the evidence, shows that it is in favour of a female; and this is much strengthened if we accept the so-called stylus as a hair-pin, for such it seems to be. "The relics found in this Envermeu interment," observes Mr. Wylie, "are indeed so contradictory, that we can well understand the embarrassment of our learned colleague in attempting a correct attribution; we cannot but regret that it is no longer possible to settle the question of the sex of the deceased by an actual inspection of the remains by some experienced anatomist. The spear, it is true, as the Abbé well observes, would induce us to decide for a male ownership; but the ear-rings, the beaded necklace, the diminutive purse-ornament, as also the chainlet by the side, so significant of the chatelaine, are all the indisputable insignia of the female sex."

To show how comparatively recent is our knowledge of Saxon and Frankish antiquities, I may point out one from many errors which prevailed not so very long since. In one of my visits to Dieppe I observed in the collection of M. Feret (one of the most active and intelligent explorers of the district) the remains of a wooden pail, or bucket, which had been discovered at Douvrend in 1838. I engraved them in plate xlv. of the second volume of my "Collectanea Antiqua," and explained them in page 169. The Abbé Cochet, misled, no doubt, as well as M. Feret, by the statements of the finder, had called it a *coiffure* or *couronne*; this notion was not readily abandoned; and his remarks on my letter in "La Normandie Souterraine," and the entire omission of my name in rectification of the error in "Sépul-

tures Gauloises," etc., seem to show he was not altogether pleased with my laconic positiveness.

One of the darkest chapters in the history of modern vandalism is that of the destruction of the Roman walls of Dax. In the fifth volume of my "*Collectanea Antiqua*" I have published an account of the intrigues of the Corporation of this town to obtain the sanction of the Government for the demolition of the walls ; their partial success ; and the unexpected way in which the destructionists were checked by the direct interposition of the Emperor. The representations and remonstrances of the most accomplished antiquaries, of the Société Française d'Archéologie ; and, lastly, of the Archæological Congress, held at Périgueux, in June, 1858, had been counteracted by the craft and audacity of the Corporation of Dax.<sup>5</sup> No misrepresentation and falsehood which could serve this object was neglected ; and so late as November 1858, as appears from the reply of the Minister of State sent to me through the Ambassador, no entreaties or reasons had thwarted the determined civic vandals. Failing with the Minister I resolved at once to appeal to the Emperor himself ; and I sought and obtained, without delay, the co-operation of the Abbé Cochet, who warmly and earnestly laid my address before the Emperor. Before the year closed the walls were out of danger. The Emperor, by special edict, had ordered them to be preserved. Ignorance and selfishness has been for a season checked, but not destroyed. After the fall of the Empire and the establishment of the Republic, the hopes of the Corporation of Dax revived. M. Thiers was petitioned ; and he readily permitted the walls to be pulled down. It was asserted that while he saw nothing in the wonderful Roman remains he discerned and estimated the value of the votes for his Government which would be obtained by the walls being supplanted by shops and dwelling-houses. Whether France was paralysed by political disasters, and could not speak, or whether the centralised Societies in Paris were ignorant of this spoliation of one of the grandest monuments of France, we can only surmise ; it may be that both causes operated to countenance the stolid heartlessness of the President of the Republic.

<sup>5</sup> See also *Arch. Journ.*, vol. xvi. p. 188, for some account of the efforts made to prevent the destruction of these relics ;

and the "*Gentleman's Magazine*" for November, 1858, p. 514, for a more detailed account by the present writer.



Cochet was of social, agreeable, and cheerful manners. On the occasion of one of my pedestrian excursions in Normandy I called upon him in his residence in the Rue d'Ecosse, in Dieppe, when he introduced me to several of his clerical friends, and showed me every attention in his power. At that time passports were required ; but I was unprovided. I suggested that he should give me one. He smiled at my request ; but when I urged that as Inspector of the Historical Monuments of the Lower Seine, he might surely admit me as one of his employés, he laughed, and readily drew up and signed a passport, giving me full liberty to go where I pleased, and calling upon all officials, civic and rural, to aid and expedite me. I was, as I had ever been, unmolested ; and no opportunity was afforded me of testing the validity of the Abbé's assumption of ministerial power ; but probably it would have been respected. He accompanied me some little distance up the valley of the Scie ; and, on parting, complimented me by saying he could scarcely believe but that I must be altogether a Frenchman.

The following facts are from M. Hardy's Biographical Notice.<sup>6</sup>

Jean-Benoît-Désiré Cochet was born at Sanvic, near Havre, on the 7th March, 1812.

His father, a veteran of the army of Napoleon the First, was at the time in charge of the battery of Sanvic. In 1814 he was transferred to Etretat ; and it was there, among a population simple in its faith and primitive manners, that our future archæologist grew up.

In 1827 M. l'Abbé Robin, curé of Notre-Dame of Havre, and afterwards Bishop of Bayeux, struck by the good promises of young Cochet, introduced him to the college of Havre, and never ceased to be interested for him. His progress was rapid ; and he soon passed on to the Séminaire of Mont-aux-Malades, where his predilection for historical studies was soon noticeable ; and, finally, having decided on the profession of religion, he entered the Grand Séminaire of Rouen. There he became acquainted with M. Emmanuel Gaillard, who incited him to the study of history by the aid

<sup>6</sup> "Notice Biographique sur M. l'Abbé Cochet, accompagnée de la Nomenclature complète de ses ouvrages." Par Michel

Hardy, 8vo., p. 24. Rouen, 1875. This excellent pamphlet has a good portrait of Cochet.

of the remains of antiquity ; and from that day Normandy could boast of another archæologist.

Two letters he had received from M. Cochet, on the existence of a Roman villa at Etretat, and on medieval remains met with in that commune, had, doubtless, excited the curiosity of the learned antiquary. When he knew the author he became at once his warm supporter, and, without delay, caused him to be named Corresponding Member of the Commission of Antiquities of the *département*. This was in March, 1834. The influence which his ardent spirit exercised upon the Commission was soon felt ; and it gradually increased, with the most happy results. In 1835 he addressed to the Commission a "Notice on the Crypt of Saint-Jean d'Abbetot," discovered in 1828 by M. E. Gaillard, and obtained leave to have it enrolled among the historical monuments for preservation. In the same year he made his first archæological excavations ; that of a Roman villa at Etretat. In 1839 he commenced his publications with "Etretat et ses environs." From the parish of Saint-François of Havre, of which he had been made vicar in 1836, he was transferred to that of Saint-Rémy of Dieppe, in 1840 ; and soon after was chosen almoner of the Lyceum of Rouen. Exhausted by incessant work, his health forced him to return to Dieppe in 1846, where he fixed himself definitely. And there, in his house in the Rue d'Ecosse, near the Place du Puits-salé, he wrote most of his works.

In 1849 he was appointed Inspector of the historical monuments of the Seine Inférieure. The volumes published by him on the churches in the districts of Havre and Dieppe show, of themselves, how well he discharged the duties of this important appointment. The "Eglises de l'arrondissement d'Yvetot," published in 1852, make us regret he did not extend his researches, in like manner, to the neighbourhoods of Rouen and Neufchâtel, and thus complete the ecclesiastical history of the department.

But already the learned antiquary had devoted himself almost exclusively to archæology ; and success led him rapidly from discovery to discovery. The publication of "La Normandie Souterraine," in 1854, extended his reputation, and led to a reprint in the following year. Immediately after the Institute awarded him the gold medal of the first class, and the Emperor decorated him with the Cross of the



Legion of Honour. In 1859 appeared the "Tombeau de Childéric," and in 1864 the "Seine-Inférieure Historique et Archéologique," re-edited in 1866; and in 1871, the "Répertoire Archéologique de la Seine-Inférieure," printed at the expense of the state. These constitute his great works; but M. Michel Hardy, from whose Notice these facts are taken, gives upwards of one hundred and thirty brochures, all of more or less interest and value.

The chief antiquarian and literary journals of France have shown the wide extent of the Abbé Cochet's popularity; but the *Bulletin Monumental*, through the eloquent pens of his colleagues M. de Cougny and M. Léon Palustre, pays, perhaps, the most graceful and appropriate tribute to his memory.

Cochet died at Rouen on the first of June last year (1875), in the sixty-fourth year of his age. He had succeeded M. Pottier, in 1867, in the curatorship of the Museum of Antiquities of Rouen, to which he had contributed so much; and of which he was justly proud. It has been told me that just before his death, and when he knew he must in a few days, or possibly hours, resign all worldly ties and affections, he ordered his attendants to carry him round the Museum, that he might once more see the associations and memorials of so many happy years. That he shed tears will be no surprise to all who can understand and appreciate the sensitive, tender nature of a man of elevated mind, such as was the Abbé Cochet.