

THE CHURCH OF SAINT RADEGONDE, NEAR TOURS.¹

By the late REV. J. L. PETIT.

I send some rough sketches of the church of St. Radegonde, near Tours, which is interesting from the excavations in the rock connected with it, and to which the early character of the building itself gives the stamp of great antiquity. A notice of this church appears in the "Memoires de la Société Archéologique de Touraine." (Tome 2--1843-1844) to which I may have occasion to refer for points of history and local tradition, or for such conjectural dates as the antiquary acquainted with the district is likely to assign with greater correctness than the casual visitor.

There is no doubt that many of those numerous caves and dwellings cut in the rocky bank which border the valley of the Loire, and which form so striking a feature in the scenery of Touraine, belong to a remote period; that many of them were the cells of recluses, or places of worship and religious instruction, or of refuge from persecution, and this not only at the first introduction of Christianity, but a later period during the invasion of the Normans. But as they are, generally speaking, wholly without architectural features, it is impossible to ascertain

¹ This paper was laid before the Society of Antiquaries so long ago as on March 4th, 1852. The MS. and drawings illustrating it were subsequently given by the Author to the late Rev. C. H. Hartshorne, on whose death they came into my possession. Although so many years have elapsed since the essay was written, I think it cannot find a better place than in the *Archaeological Journal*, or fail to be welcome to the members of the Institute. And those members who had the privilege of Mr. Petit's friendship, as well as those who remember his genial

presence at the meetings, will doubtless agree that it can never be too late to bring to light a paper by so highly gifted a man, and illustrated by his inimitable and brilliant sketches.

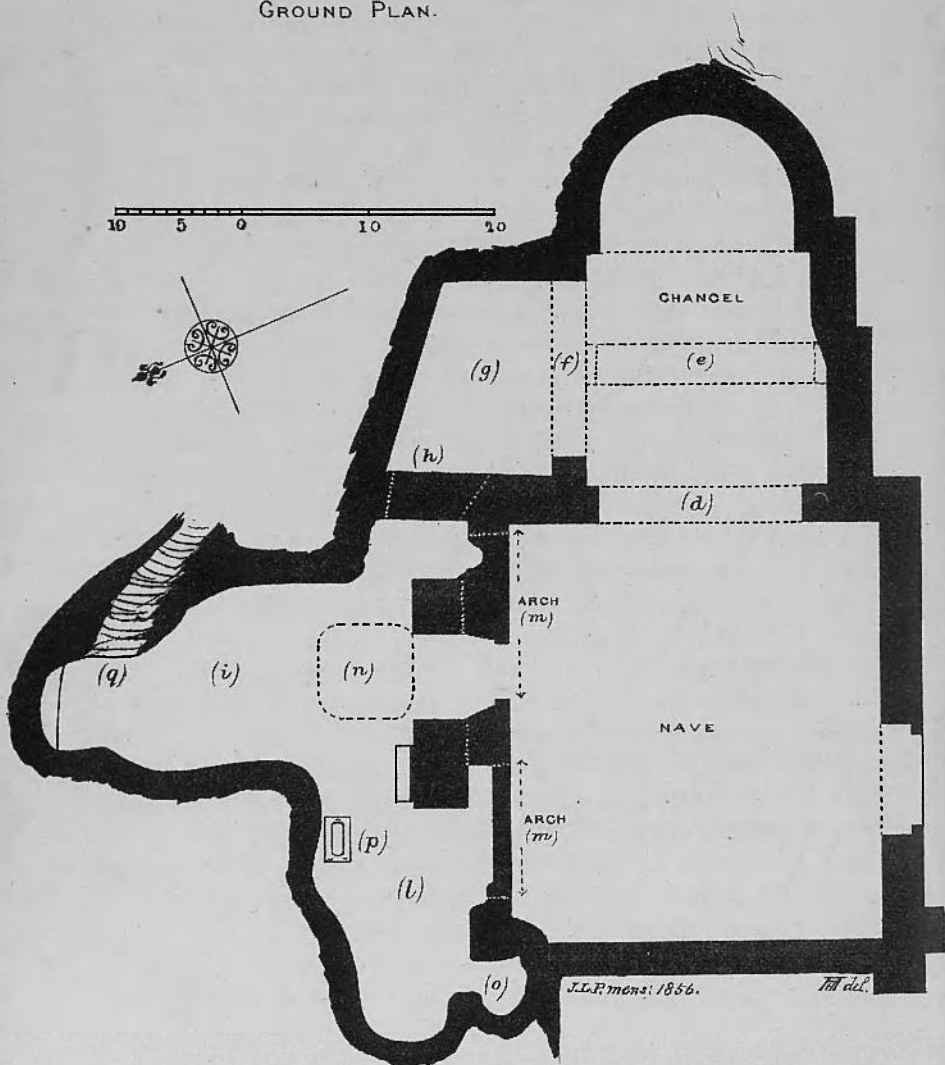
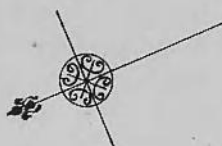
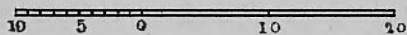
By the kindness of Miss Petit, who has lent me her brother's original notes on St. Radegonde, I have been able to draw out a plan from his own measurements, which, without pretending to absolute accuracy, will probably furnish all that is necessary towards the fuller comprehension of the paper.--ALBERT HARTSHORNE.

which are of ancient, and which of comparatively modern, or even recent construction. I understand there are some within the precincts of the abbey of Marmontier, now occupied by a religious establishment, to which tradition points as those in which St. Gatien assembled his hearers in the 3d century, and which probably influenced St. Martin towards the end of the succeeding century, in his choice of a spot for the foundation of his abbey. The remains of this abbey, reduced to a part of the external walls with a few round towers, and a very beautiful gateway of the 13th century, stand at the eastern extremity of the suburb which extends along the northern bank of the Loire, opposite the city of Tours, between the rock and the river; and before the construction of the dyke, the spot must have been difficult of access and subject to frequent inundations. A very short distance to the north-west of these remains is the church of S. Radegonde, which at first sight presents the appearance of a building of the 11th or 12th century, with nothing unusual in its plan or outline, consisting of a nave, to which is attached a north tower, a chancel, and an apse. The gables of the nave have been raised, and some insertions made, at a late period. The sketch (No. 1) shews it in this aspect. It will be observed that the apse is engaged in the other buildings, but this would not be noticed as anything unusual, as a perfectly insulated church in continental towns is not of very common occurrence. But on closer examination we find that the building connected with the apse is partly cut out in the rock, and on going round to the west, we see that the church itself is fixed against the bank of rock, and that the tower, instead of springing from the level of the floor, is built on an elevated spot commanding the roof of the church, as shewn in No. 2 and No. 3. Externally the base of this tower is only to be reached by a circuitous path up the hill.

We will first consider the date of the building itself as shewn by external indications. The memoir that I refer to assigns as the date of the apse, the 10th century, and of the choir, nave, and tower the 11th. As the apse is considered to belong to so early a period, I have given (No. 4) a sketch of one of the brackets and part of the

CHURCH OF ST. RADEGONDE NEAR TOURS.

GROUND PLAN.



J.L.P. mens: 1856.

1811 del.

cornice. The ornament on the latter, which I think I have seen called "*Moulure en échiquier*" is extremely common in French Romanesque and seems to pervade the whole period during which that style prevailed, from the earliest to the latest. In effect it is somewhat sharper than the billet moulding, for which it may be mistaken at a distance, and more powerful than the English hatched moulding, to which it bears some analogy. It may possibly occur in English work, but I do not at present recollect examples. This moulding is continued along a part of the chancel, in which for my own part I cannot see any mark to distinguish it in date from the apse.

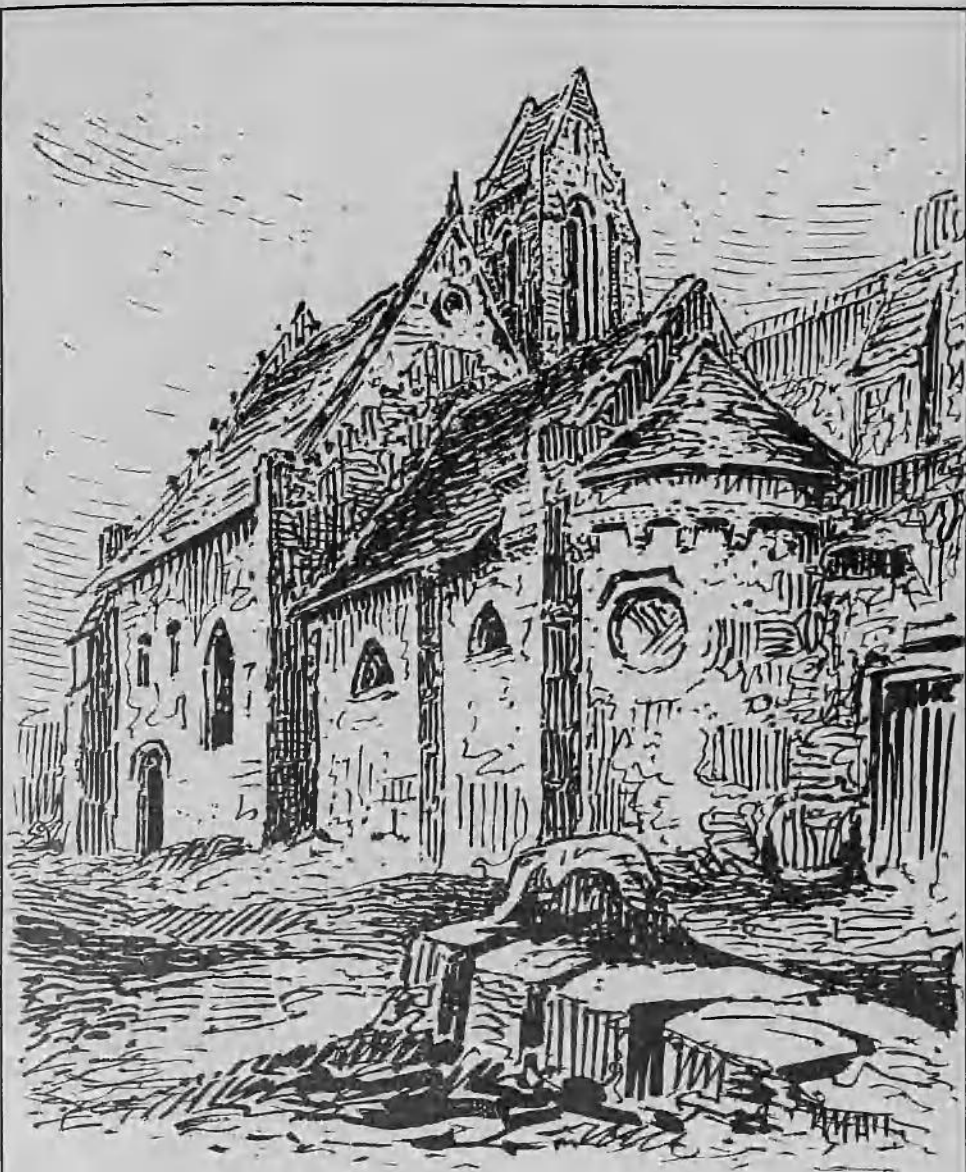
The nave is considerably wider than the chancel, and has two original roundheaded windows of small size. The door is of a late period, and what is remarkable, no indications of a Romanesque door appear; and it is well known how constantly the Romanesque door is preserved, when every other feature of that style is changed. Of the tower, to which the 11th century is given as a date, it may be remarked that the windows have an obtuse point which is by no means of rare occurrence in the south of France in work even of an earlier period. The gables are probably a late addition.

On entering the nave we find it to be perfectly plain, wide in proportion to its length, in fact nearly square, and unvaulted, very similar to the naves of many Romanesque churches in the neighbourhood, some of which are considered to belong to an extremely early period of the style. I may instance Chauncay, Pont Ruan, St. Branch and Artannes. The timber roof is of late date. In the upper part of the north wall, near the west end, we observe a portion of rock breaking through the masonry, and near it is a wooden construction, which I am told conceals a still larger projecting piece. In the west wall are indications of a round arch, the crown of which is considerably lower than that of a door adapted to the present level of the pavement. The chancel arch (d, in the plan) is plain, pointed, and of a single square order; possibly replacing an earlier arch of smaller dimensions. The chancel has a northern transept, (g) faced with a round arch bearing late mouldings, no doubt cut upon the older work. This compartment on examination

is seen to be cut out in the rock, and has no lining of masonry; its roof is cylindrical. On its west side is an arch now blocked up. The vault of the chancel is also cylindrical, and is divided into two compartments by a round arch of a single square order, resting on brackets of an early character, one of which is fixed above the crown of the transept arch (*f*). The lower part of this bracket is curved, according to the form of the arch beneath it, as may be seen in the sketch (No. 5) which shews the north side of the chancel with its transept cut in the rock. The vaulting of the apse is semi-domical. This as well as the chancel roof presents a smooth surface of masonry, though some must be attached to the inner surface of rock scooped out to receive it.

On the north side of the nave is a small door, through which we pass, between two massive piers of masonry, into a cavern branching in different directions. These piers seem intended to contribute to the support of the tower above, which is marked by an opening in the roof of the cave (*n*) forming an irregular oval at the surface, but cut square higher up to correspond with the area of the tower. The bell-ropes are let down through this opening, so that the ringer performs his office at the entrance of the cavern.

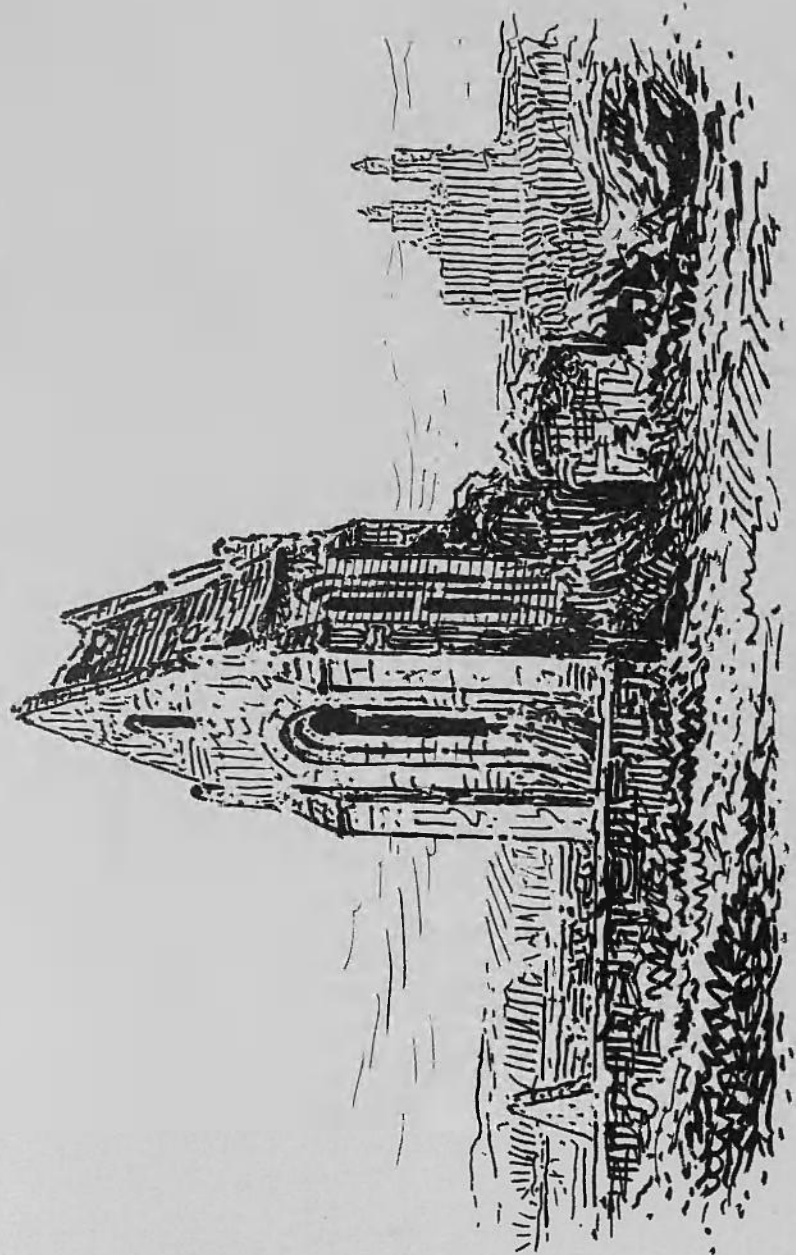
In front, extending to the northward, is the chamber (*i*) cut entirely in the rock, with a rough sort of cylindrical vault. The depth of this chamber, taken from the pier of door, would be somewhat more than 30 feet; its width about 15, and the height of the vault between 11 and 12 feet. At the northern extremity is a small recess about 3 feet from the ground. From the east side of this chamber branches out a staircase cut thro' the rock, and leading straight to a door which opens upon the roof of the chancel. The passage up the steps is 3 ft. 4 in. wide, and the opening, a round segmental arch, 2 ft. 6 in. The sketch No. 6 is taken from the north end of chamber (*i*), and shows the door opening into the church, as well as the staircase cut thro' the rock. To the left hand of the north door, as we go from the church into the cavern, is another chamber (*l*), of an irregular form. This contains at (*p*.) a sort of chest or coffin fixed in the ground, and formed of two pieces of stone. From its external dimensions



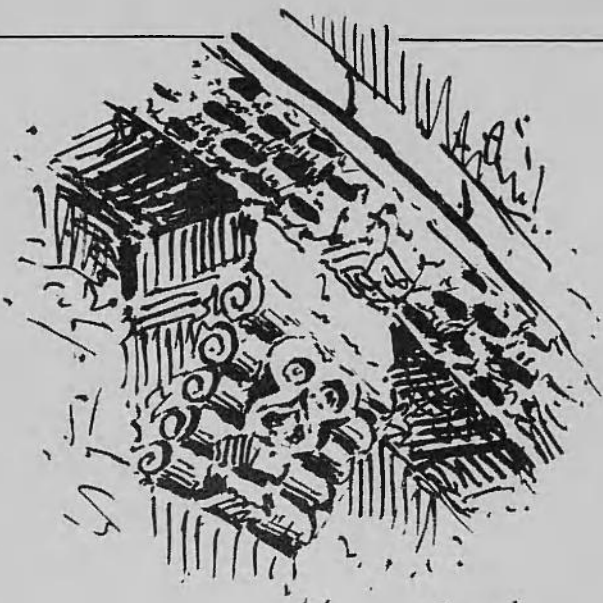
S. Radsgonde. Tower - S E.



S. Hadryonde. S.W.



S. Radegonde -



Cornice
of apse

Cornice & brackets
of apse - S. Radegonde

* White upright
shaded oblique
black horizontal

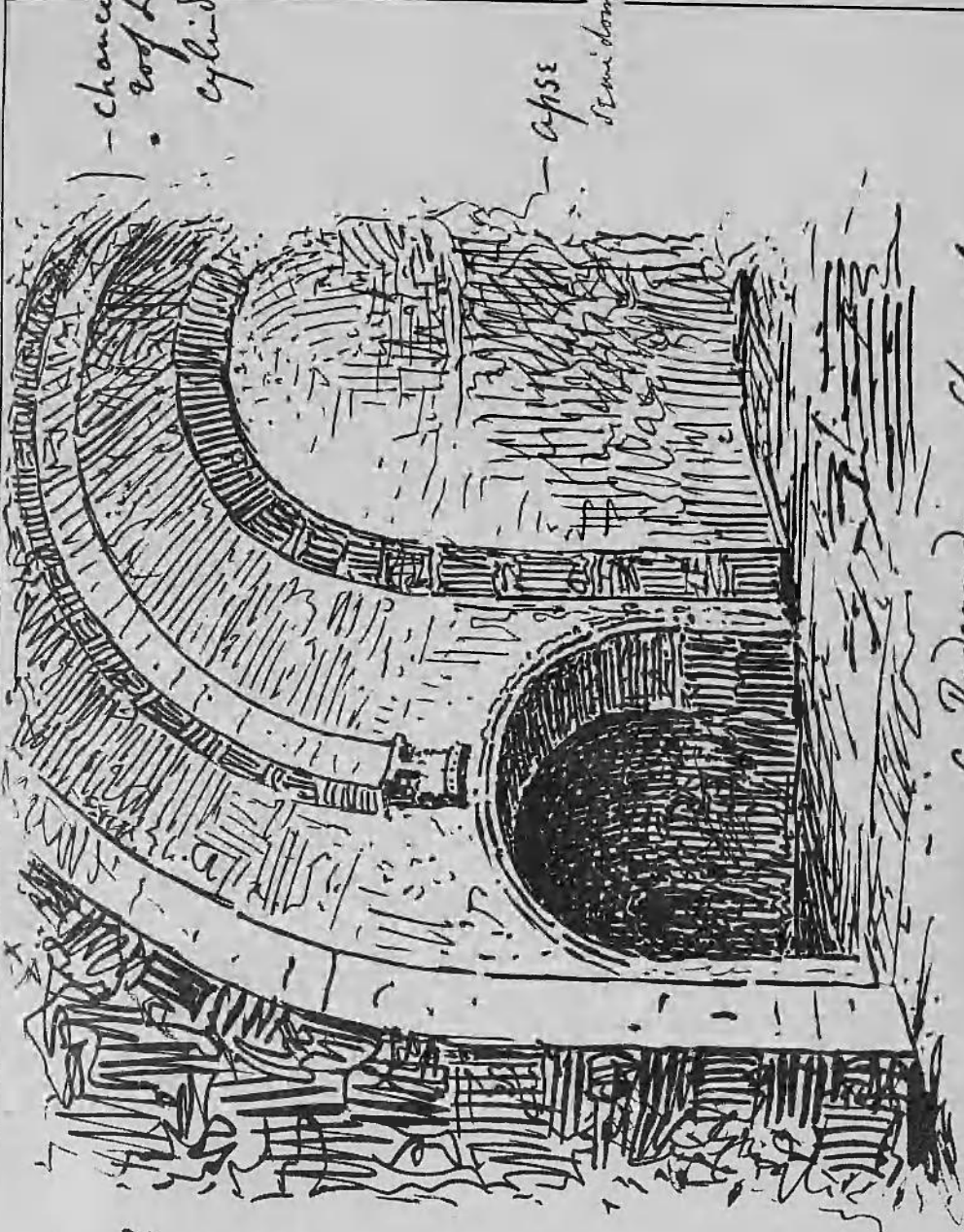


stone chest in the cavern
S. Radegonde



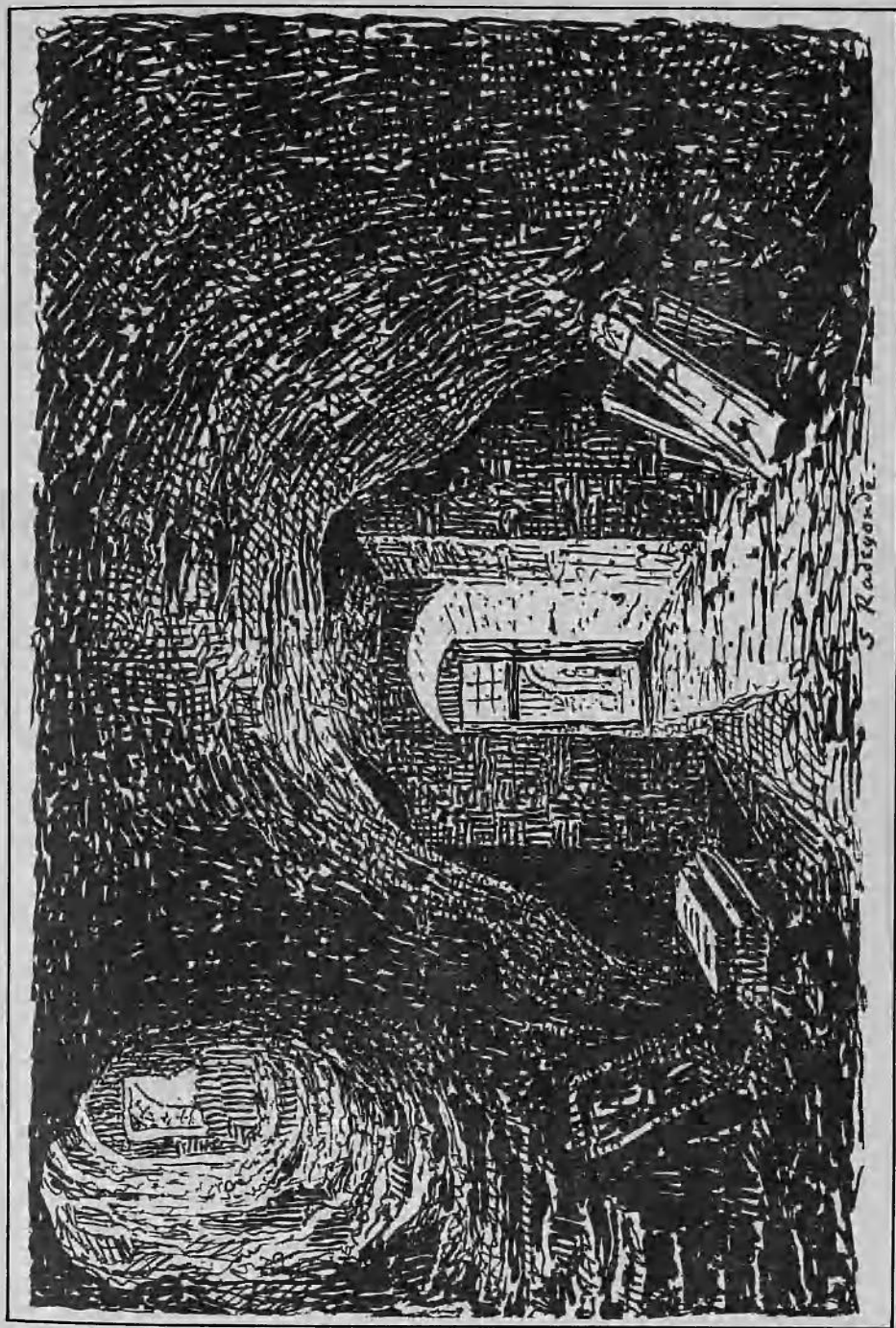
- channel
roof
cylindrical

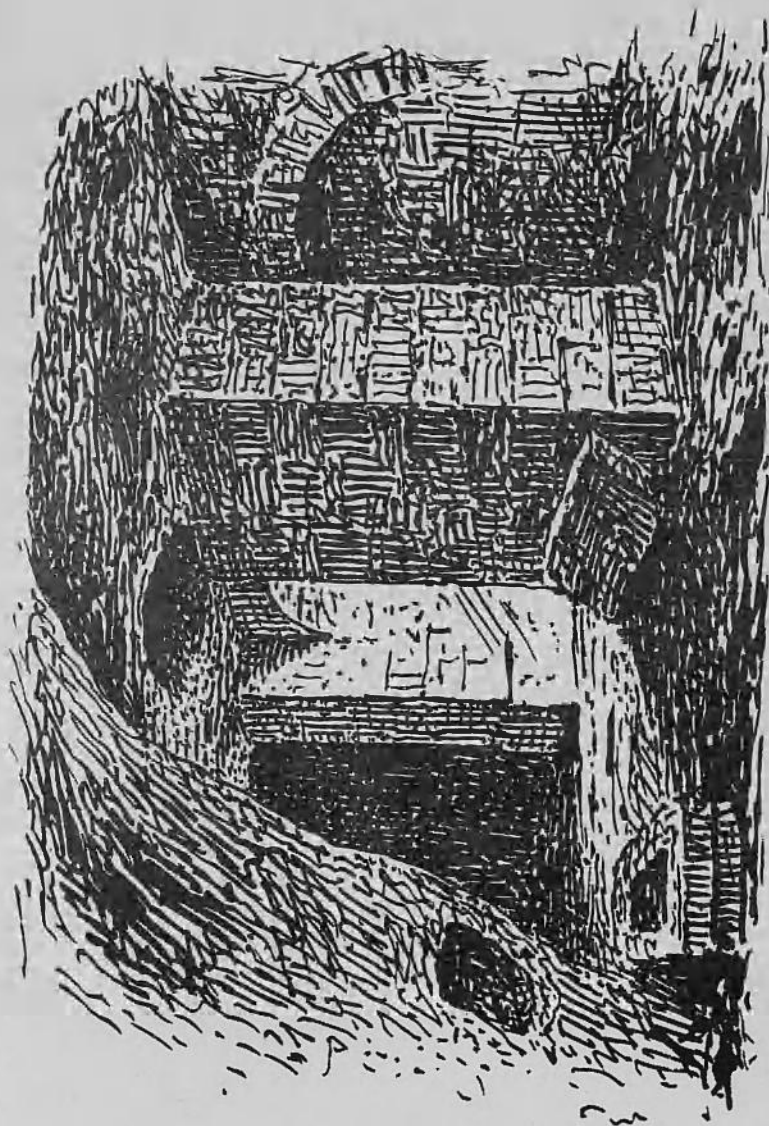
- apse
semi domical



X channel
arch
pointed.

S. Radegonde - Channel



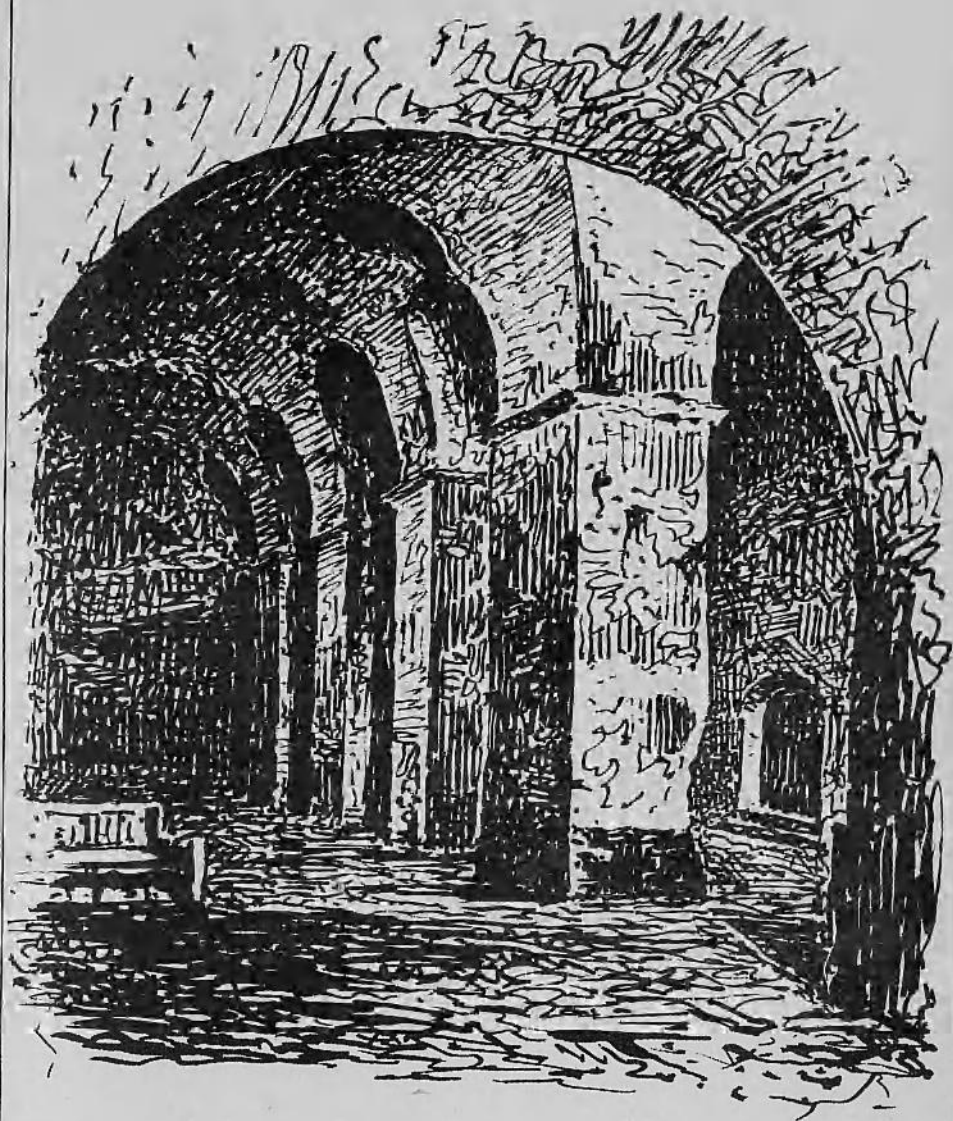


S. Radegonde



S. George - W. Towns.





S. Emilion



(3 ft. 6 in. long, by 2 ft. 2 in. wide) it could, if used for sepulchral purposes, only have contained bones after burning, or relics. It has staples at each end, and near it is a slab of a larger size than necessary to form a lid; but it may have served as the upper stone of an altar. Just above the chest is a small recess similar to an aumbry, cut in the rock. But according to the notice in the *Touraine Archæological transactions*, the sepulchral remains in this crypt have been much disturbed; and indeed I cannot clearly connect the description given in the article, with the present appearances. At the N.W. angle of the church is a small low chamber (*o*), entered by a narrow door of masonry.

The sketch (No. 7) also shews part of a round arch blocked up by the wall of the nave, and stopped by the western pier of the door. Another portion of a round arch occurs eastward of the other pier. The two if complete would rest upon a pier not exactly occupying the site of either of the present ones, and must have belonged to a structure earlier than the existing church.

This feature appears to indicate at least two applications of masonry, at distant periods, to the excavation. My own impression is that there originally existed a low natural arch or cavern, of no great depth, extending nearly from the western point of the chamber (*l*), to some point in the chamber (*g*). That the first operation was to scoop out the chamber (*i*) to the northward, and from that to drive the staircase (*q*) obliquely, forming a passage to a narrow ledge of rock which might have been selected as a mode of access less exposed to observation, or a way of escape. That the chambers (*l*) and (*g*) were added or enlarged, and the front of the cavern for the sake of greater security strengthened by the arches (*m*) (*m*) and (*h*). It is possible that an outer wall was built round the whole, which might have enclosed a space equal to the present nave and chancel, and that the low western arch I have mentioned may have been the entrance. All this might have existed previous to the time of St. Radegonde herself, who was born in 519 and died at Poitiers in 587. Subsequent to this, probably in the 10th or 11th century, the church may have been commenced on its present plan, and completed without the mutilation of the arches

into the cavern. I can hardly think the belfry was added before the 12th century, and it might very well have been built originally without the support of the present piers, as the thickness of the rock, and the arches then existing would authorise the architect to proceed on his work without fear. In fact I consider these piers and the facing of the north wall to the interior to be of comparatively a late date, possibly corresponding with that of the present gables and inserted windows. Be this as it may, the character of the work, as it now appears, seems to establish a very early date as belonging to the excavations themselves.

About a mile to the eastward of Marmontier, in a rocky valley falling into that of the Loire, is the village of St. George, where there is a staircase cut in the rock, very perfect and of considerable dimensions, but of which the masonry connected with it does not clearly shew the date, at least to a stranger. But there is also a chapel, which has some points of resemblance to the church just described, and has work apparently of the same period. The plan is more unusual, the eastern end being flat, and the tower ranging with it. Westward of the tower is a chapel or aisle partly cut in the rock, and communicating with the nave by a round arch, and to the north of the tower, extending eastward of it, is a chapel entirely cut out in the rock, and with more architectural character than that of S. Radegonde, as the roof has a cross vaulting similar to that which occurs in the aisles of our Norman Cathedrals.

As I was not made acquainted with this specimen till the last day of my visit at Tours, I had not time to make any plan or measurements. I give a rough sketch of the east end externally, (No. 8.)

I add a list of excavated churches near Angoulême copied from the *Statistique Monumentale de la Charente* (Par J. H. Michon, Paris, Derache, Libraire, Rue du Bouloy, 7, 1844).

Eglises taillées dans la Roc ayant servi de Paroisses.

Aubeterre.

Gurat.

Chapelles d'Hermitages.

Bellevau.

Lyon.

Grottes habitées par des Saints.

Grotte de S. Cybard, à Angoulême.

Grotte de S. Gautier, à Confolens.

I had not an opportunity of visiting these. From the description given in the work it appears that Aubeterre has an aisle separated from the nave by two polygonal piers, and that Gurat has an opening to a belfry tower, now destroyed.

I contrived to pay a very hurried visit to that marvellous old town, S. Emilion, on the Dordogne. Its rock church is probably well known to most antiquaries by plans and engravings. It seems originally to have had no addition of masonry whatever, though now it has external work from the 12th to the 16th century. Still the face of the rock is not altogether masked. In the sketch (No. 9) the naked rock comes up to the line cut by the point of the porch gable; the mullions of the lower windows being, of course, additions of masonry. Above this line the rock is faced with squared stone. The porch is of stone work, and belongs to the 14th century. The oldest part of the tower (built on the rock, and communicating with the church beneath by an aperture) is about the 12th century; the pinnacles and spire later. The interior of the church is purely cut in the rock. It has two side aisles, each separated from the central one by four square piers. The roofs are cylindrical, or perhaps more strictly, the section forms a sort of parabola. As the spring of the vault is the same with that of the pier arches, the latter have a double curvature, partaking of that of the roof. Near the crown of one of the arches (see No. 10) is the opening into the belfry. On the roof at (*a*) are sculptured two angels, but apparently of a later date. On parts however of the rock are earlier sculptures. The string round one of the piers has a small quantity of the moulding described as running round the apse at S. Radegonde; this was probably executed long after the original excavation of the church.

I fear I have given a somewhat tedious account, and perhaps the subject is not one of which the investigation would lead to any important result, still some may consider it as a not uninteresting, though it may be an isolated episode in the history of church architecture.