

## THE PERIODS OF CHURCH ARCHITECTURE.



FIG. 1.

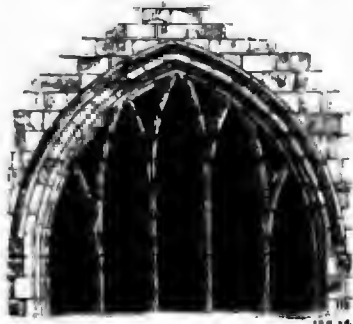


FIG. 2.



FIG. 3.



FIG. 4.



FIG. 5.

## THE SEVEN PERIODS OF CHURCH ARCHITECTURE.

Our readers are already acquainted to some extent with Mr. Sharpe's views on the nomenclature and divisions of mediæval architecture.\* He has recently published a small work on the subject,† and has read a paper upon it with especial reference to the subordination and distinctive character of the mouldings at the Institute of Architects.‡

In the latter Mr. Sharpe said,—Though it may be difficult to assign a reason, the fact is undeniable that the cultivation of the study of our national architecture, at least of the critical and historical part, has been almost entirely abandoned by the professional architect, and left in the hands of architectural amateurs; yet, while we are willing to admit our infinite obligations for the light which these gentlemen have thrown on the subject, we may fairly contend that it is to the pains, talent, and zeal of the hard-working architect and architectural draughtsman, that those admirable illustrations of our ancient monuments, and those faithful transcripts of their minutest details are due, which afford at the present day to these very authors such unexampled facilities for a fire-side study of the matter. It is, however, to be feared, that unless such labours are made the basis of some order and system, or subservient to the elucidation of some branch of the inquiry, they will hardly gain the well-earned recognition of merit due to them, nor be considered by our literary friends more favourably than as detached portions, valuable contributions undoubtedly, but requiring to be connected and formed by some learned professor into a complete system. Now there is, perhaps, no branch of the study of church architecture, in the treatment of which the disadvantage arising from the absence of all inquiry into the principles of construction on the part of those who have handled it, is more apparent, than in that which I have undertaken to bring before you this evening. The inquiry which would naturally suggest itself to the practical mind of the architect, as the first to

be made, namely, how the parts are put together, before considering how they are clothed and dressed, that first step in the investigation has yet to be taken. We cannot, in fact, take up the subject from any point which has already been reached by previous writers, or treat it upon any plan that has already been laid down; but we must commence the investigation again from the beginning, and upon new principles.

Church architecture was essentially an architecture of transition. A regular and gradual progress is observable throughout the six or seven centuries into which it is divided; and this appears to have been carried on simultaneously in different parts of the country. It is, therefore, impossible to divide our architecture into any distinct number of orders, or styles. To arrange it in any given number of periods is a matter of difficulty, and must necessarily be arbitrary; but it is essential, for the purpose of description, that we should divide and classify the buildings which are left to us. Although the successive changes were so gradual, they were yet so continuous and complete, that fifty years did not elapse without a total change of form, not in the mere outline, but also in the details. We naturally find, however, that certain features were retained as favourite ones longer than others, and these may give us a means of classification. One principal division of the subject has been generally admitted; that which divides the whole into two principal classes,—namely, those which contain the circular arch, and those which contain the pointed arch. The earlier of these has been termed Romanesque, and the later of them Gothic. This is so simple and so natural a division, that, without quarrelling with the terms which have been already adopted and used for so long a time, I at once adopt them, being satisfied that they are well understood. Taking these two terms, we have one simple division of the subject, which may be made the ground work of minuter divisions, for these are not sufficiently minute to answer the purposes of particular classification and description. It is also evident, that there is one class of buildings that was erected before the circular arch disappeared, but after the pointed arch appeared, which is comprised in neither one nor the other of these divisions.

As regards the earlier, or Romanesque, no division can be more efficient, than that which divides buildings of that class into those which were erected previous, and those which were erected subsequently, to the conquest, and describes them respectively as Saxon and Norman.

As to the intermediate period alluded to, to none other can the term Transitional be so well applied as to the buildings erected under those remarkable influences which existed during the contest between the two antagonistic periods which ended, about the close of the twelfth century, in the complete establishment of the pointed arch.

As to the Gothic period, no better division of it can be employed than that which is characterized by the four different forms under which the window appeared. These four divisions are shown in the diagrams, which, in fact, speak for themselves.

For his reasons for adopting the nomenclature he advocates, we go to Mr. Sharpe's book, and give the following extract:—

"For half a century or more after the disappearance of the circular arch the window appeared under a form which, from its general resemblance to a lancet, in its length, breadth, and principal proportions, rather than from any uniform acuteness in the shape of its head, led to the universal application of that term to all the windows of this period. This observation applies equally to the window whether used singly or in groups of two, three, five, or seven; and equally also to the later as to the earlier examples of this period."

It is proposed therefore to denominate this the LANCET PERIOD of Gothic Architecture. (See Fig. 1.)

Towards the close of this Period the practice of combining a plurality of lancets, under one arch, or hood-moulding—and of piercing the solid spaces that intervened between the heads of these lancets and the underside of this arch in various ornamental ways, became common; by the adoption of which, a group of several lancets was converted into a single window of several lights. (See Fig. 2.) Out of this practice arose a novel and beautiful discovery; this was the invention of Tracery.

For nearly three-quarters of a century after its introduction, the tracery of windows con-

\* See Vol. VIII. p. 452.  
† "The Seven Periods of Church Architecture Defined and Illustrated. By E. Sharpe, M.A., Architect. Geo. Bell, London, 1851. We recommend the book to attention."  
‡ This was on May 19th.