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Notes on French Jubes Or Roodlofts

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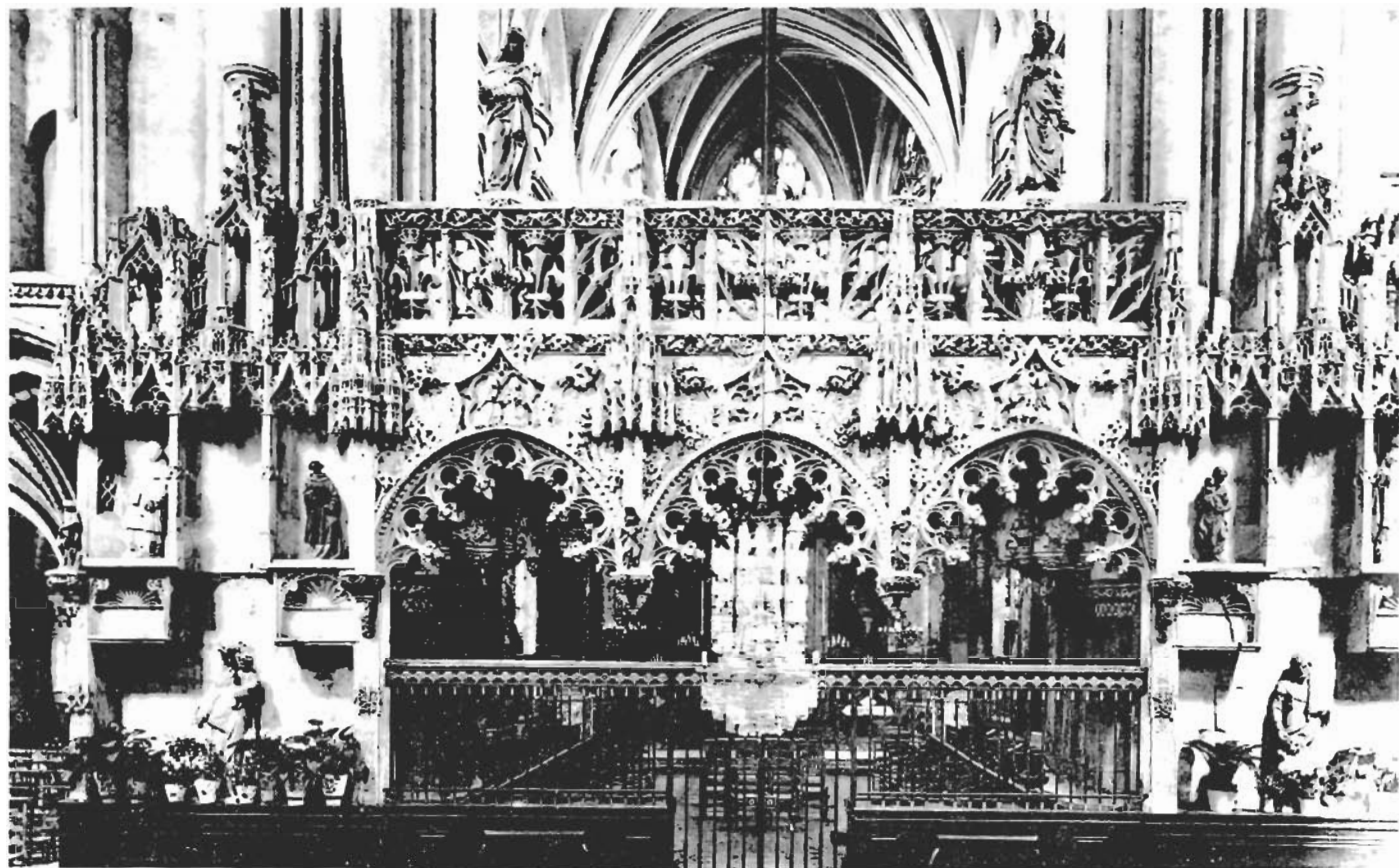
NOTES ON FRENCH *JUBÉS* OR ROOD-LOFTS,
AND THE THREE STONE ONES STILL
EXISTING IN FRANCE.

By F. F. TUCKETT.

MUCH interest having been excited amongst our members by Mr. F. F. Fox's admirable and beautifully illustrated Presidential Address on "Roods and Rood-Lofts," I venture to lay before you, by way of modest postscript, a few notes on the subject, partly gathered from various articles by that great architect, M. Viollet le Duc, and partly the result of enquiries made this spring during visits to a dozen or more of the greater cathedrals of France.

Mr. Fox observes that "the *ambones* of the Greek and Latin churches up to the fourteenth century were not at all in form what we call a 'rood-loft,' and the French a '*jubé*,'" being "rather vast pulpits . . . than screens like those of the Western churches, which, dating probably from the thirteenth century, form a separation, a sort of raised gallery, between the choir and nave." He adds that "there does not exist in France a single *jubé* of the ancient period, and yet the abbey churches, cathedrals, and even many parish churches possessed them."

This latter statement (probably referring to a date earlier than the thirteenth century) is doubtless correct, but I think it may be worth noting that, independently of some *débris* of former *jubés* still existing—especially some lovely painted and gilded thirteenth century fragments carefully preserved in a southern side chapel of the vast crypt of Chartres Cathedral,—my wife and I, in our recent wanderings, came upon a fine and perfect example in stone in "Ste. Madeleine," the oldest church in the city of Troyes, commenced in the eleventh, continued in the twelfth, and finished at the end of the fifteenth or beginning of the sixteenth century. The *jubé*, which constitutes one of its chief ornaments, is from the



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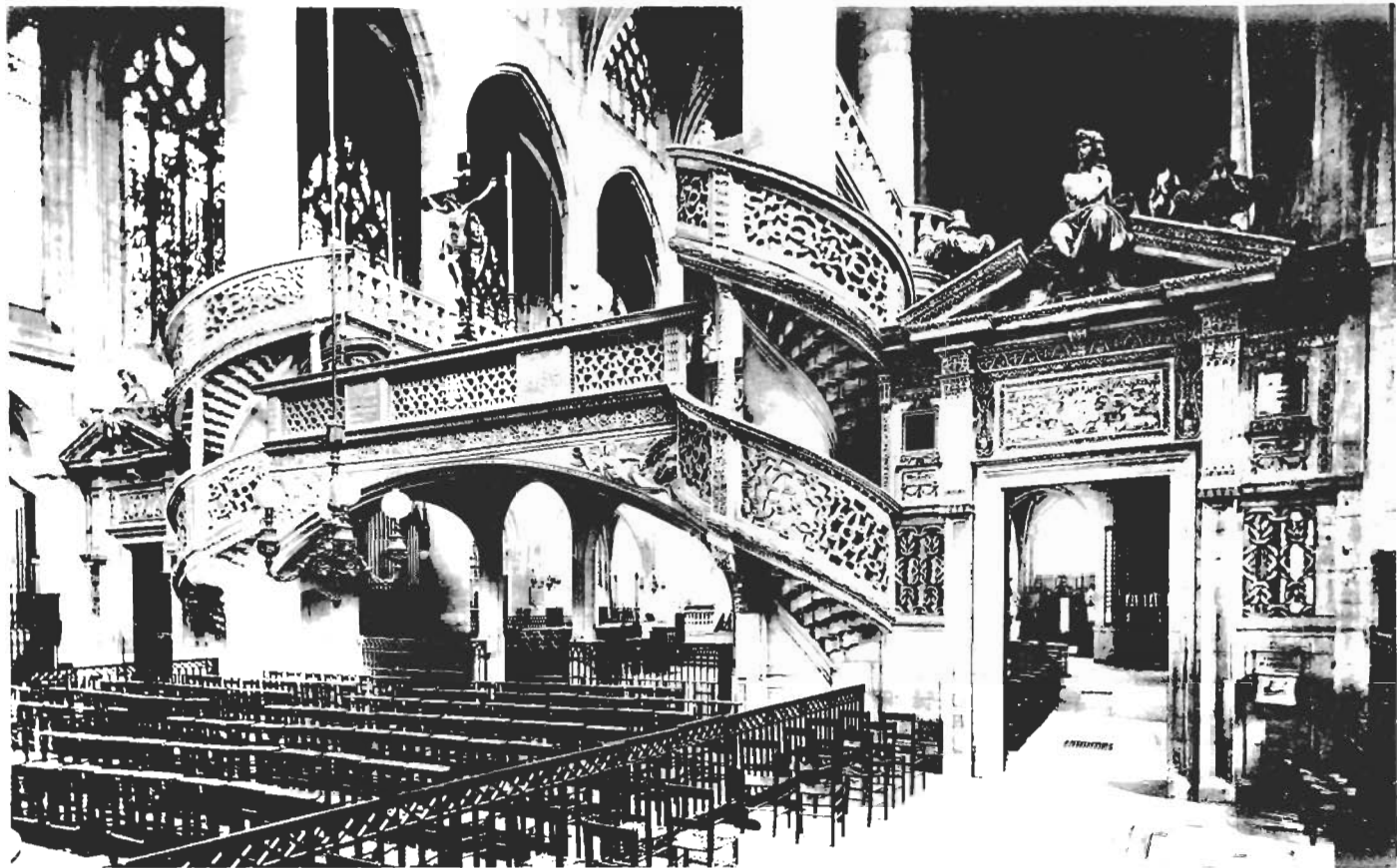
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chisel of Jean Guaidé (1508—1517), and the illustration will give a better idea of the delicacy and richness of the execution than any mere description could do. Its height is 6.45 mètres, or about 21 feet.

In the church of St. Étienne du Mont (commenced in 1517 and completed in 1626), which occupies the site of the abbey founded by Clovis on the summit of the hill overlooking Paris on the south, and in the immediate neighbourhood of the Panthéon, is another stone *jubé* which was begun in 1600. It is in the style of the Renaissance, and the sculptures are the work of a little-known but very talented artist, Bécard senior. The two lateral spiral staircases, which also give access to the triforium, are a very prominent feature of the structure. For the details, the photographic reproduction will render further description unnecessary.

I now come to the third and, I believe, only other existing stone *jubé* in France, which is certainly the most splendid of all, and can hardly at any time have been surpassed in delicacy of workmanship. I allude to that in the cathedral of Albi, the small capital of the Department of the Tarn, and situated on the river of the same name, rather less than 50 miles N.E. of Toulouse. Albi was the capital of the Albigeois country, the scene of the terrible crusade under Simon de Montfort (father of the great Earl of Leicester, who perished in the battle of Evesham) against the Albigenses early in the thirteenth century. The cathedral, dedicated to "Ste. Cécile," is of brick, and was commenced in 1282 and finished in the fifteenth century. The ornamentation, as may be seen in the illustration, is quite lace-like in its marvellous delicacy. Cardinal Richelieu is said to have been so charmed with it in 1629 that he had a drawing made of it and the choir, with the intention of constructing a chapel of the same character in his Paris residence. The choir itself is similarly, and not less exquisitely adorned. The entire work was carried out under Bishop Louis I. d'Amboise (1473—1502).

In addition to the three stone *jubés* just described,



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St. Étienne du Mont

M. Viollet le Duc states that wooden ones still exist in some country churches of Bretagne, the most remarkable being that of St. Fiacre at Le Faouët (Morbihan), which dates from the end of the fifteenth century and is entirely painted.

Let us now for a moment consider the origin of the *jubé* as it has existed since the thirteenth century. M. Viollet le Duc tells us that the great French cathedrals built at the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth centuries not only possessed no *jubés*, but were not erected with a view to such a structure. The sanctuary was uniformly unenclosed, and the *jubé* only made its appearance after the Act of Union of the Barons of France in 1246, when the bishops were forced to surrender their claim to have cognizance of all judiciary proceedings—a claim based on the pretext that, every suit being the result of a fraud, and every fraud a sin, it was for the religious authority to judge in matters of real, personal, or mixed property, feudal or criminal disputes, and even simple misdemeanours. Being restricted by the firmness of St. Louis, the establishment of royal bailiffs, and the organization of the parliament, to a spiritual jurisdiction, except that which they exercised as feudal lords, the bishops contented themselves with converting the cathedrals into episcopal churches, and shut themselves up with their chapters in those vast sanctuaries, elevated originally by an inspiration at once political and religious.

In the case of the monastic churches the participation of the faithful was only an accessory, and the monks, shut up in the choir, were not, and need not be, seen from the nave; the faithful heard their chants, saw the clerks mounted on the *jubé* to read the epistle and the gospel, and only caught sight of the altar through the doorway of the *jubé* when the veil was withdrawn. There was always in these monasteries a considerable number of strangers, pilgrims, and refugees for whom the nave of the church was reserved, and who there passed a large portion of their time, sometimes remaining there even throughout the day and night. Thus it became necessary to close the choir of the Brethren. This arrange-

ment, however, did not apply to the parochial, still less to the cathedral churches. These last, when they were almost all rebuilt in France at the end of the twelfth century, had at once a religious and a civil character, and except the altar surrounded by its draperies nothing obstructed the view. In constructing them on a huge scale the object of the bishops was rather to offer to the citizens ample space in which not only religious ceremonies but civil assemblies should have abundant room. In fact, episcopal jurisdiction was the true link which united the ancient Basilica and the Christian church. The cathedral was not simply a church appropriated to Divine worship, but retained, especially during the early ages of Christianity, the character of a sacred tribunal; and, as the civil was not entirely distinct from the religious constitution, cathedrals in France continued until the thirteenth or fourteenth century to be edifices at once religious and civil. They were frequented not only in order to take part in religious services, but assemblies of a purely political character took place in them, though doubtless religion had its part in these great civil or military gatherings.

The spirit which animated their construction was, in opposition to the monasteries, to draw and unite the dwellers in populous cities around their bishop, so that the religious festivals should be common to all alike. Therefore the choirs and sanctuaries were only slightly raised, the transepts were left free to the congregation, and the ambulatories were generally on the same level and were not separated from the choir by any barrier. With the second half of the thirteenth century there came the change already referred to. Whether the bishops and chapters were no longer willing that their cathedrals should retain the character of great halls suitable for large popular assemblies, or found themselves too much exposed to view in choirs accessible on all sides, they began by setting up *jubés* in front, and shortly afterwards erected lofty and entirely closed barriers around the choir, protecting rows of high-backed and canopied stalls. The canons were

thus secluded in the cathedrals, as the cloistered regulars were in their monastic churches. But since it was essential in the cathedrals that the faithful should participate in religious services, though unable to witness the ceremonies which took place in the entirely enclosed choirs, there were constructed in episcopal churches numerous chapels around the ambulatories and even along the walls of the naves. The dominant idea which had inspired the bishops at the end of the twelfth century, when they proceeded to construct cathedrals on new plans, was thus abandoned almost before the fabrics were completed, and in less than a century the majority of the choirs of these great churches were shut in and the rites of worship largely concealed from the faithful. Whatever variety of causes may have contributed to such a result, amongst the number may probably be reckoned disputes between the bishops and their chapters, which resulted in the former having to give way to the desire of the latter, who were particularly interested in the enclosures.

In parish churches the choir reproduced on a smaller scale the arrangements adopted in the cathedrals; but, as they were especially for the use of the faithful laity, the choir was generally only enclosed by an iron railing, and the altar was visible through the arches and delicate supporting pillars of the *jubés*. Moreover, it does not appear that *jubés* were originally erected at the entrance of the choirs of these parochial churches, but were set up at the end of the fifteenth and commencement of the sixteenth century.

In conclusion, it would seem that the result of the changes introduced into the choir by its enclosure on the side of the ambulatory and the construction of a *jubé* across its entrance, was the practical exclusion of the laity from taking more than a very subordinate part in the performance of worship in the choir, their share in it being limited to hearing the reading of the epistle and gospel from the *jubé* and the chanting behind it.

The question may be asked, What has led to the general disappearance in France of the *jubé* or rood-loft,

even where the isolation of the choir from the ambulatory has been maintained? I confess that, in my ignorance, I had imagined that the change might be one of the results of the great Revolution. I was surprised, therefore, to find, on making enquiries in one cathedral after another, that the removal of these beautiful but impeding structures had considerably preceded that great national awakening, generally by at least half a century, and was due apparently to considerations of general convenience and with a view to the fuller participation of the laity in all the details of the service. About the same time, in many cases, the glorious glass of the choir clerestory windows was taken down, and plain or grisaille substituted, with a view to admitting more light into the previously too deep gloom of the sanctuary.

The great cathedrals of France, especially in the north, were at their original construction the outward and glorious sign of a great national upheaval against secular and monastic feudalism, of which the bishops, supported by the Monarchy, skilfully availed themselves. They, in their turn, as has been seen, sought to practice the very jurisdiction from which their own power had suffered, and, when balked in the attempt by St. Louis and his parliament, they—largely doubtless at the instigation of the canons—seem to have resorted to the plan of enclosing themselves in the choir from the vulgar gaze as far as might be.

Certainly, whilst we may regret the loss of so much exquisite sculpture, we cannot but rejoice in the far nobler architectural vistas opened up by its disappearance, and even indulge a hope that the day may come when our own beautiful cathedral of Gloucester may again be seen in all its noble proportions, without any such impediment as that which now so painfully disfigures it.