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REMARKS ON THE EARLY CHRISTIAN BASILICAS, IN CONNECTION WITH THE RECENT DISCOVERIES AT LYMINGE.

BY CANON R. C. JENKINS, RECTOR OF LYMINGE.

THE ancient Basilica, or Imperial Residence, in which were included the courts of Judicature and the halls of Audience, were so manifestly and singularly adapted for the purposes of Christian worship, that we cannot wonder at the fact that they were dedicated to this new object by the Christian Emperors, and that the churches founded by them were built upon this simple plan. The transfer of the temples of heathenism to Christians, which had sometimes taken place during the temporary triumphs of their religion, must ever have tended to corrupt the new faith and to present contrasts and incongruities to its earlier professors. From this latter source may be derived that multiplication of altars and chapels which is admitted by the Dottore Antonio dell' Oghna, in his memoir drawn up for the Bishop of Montepulciano and presented to the assembly of Bishops at Florence in 1787, to have been derived from the altars and chapels dedicated to the *Dii contubernales* in the Heathen Temples. In the Petrine Basilica of Ravenna these altars reached at last the extraordinary number of three hundred and the abuse was resisted, but in vain, by repeated councils and Pontiffs. The simpler form of the Basilica was best fitted to restrain these excesses, for it consisted merely of an oblong building, having at the end opposite the portico a semi-circular apse for the tribune, and was divided by two rows of columns into three naves, giving little scope for multiplied altars or unnecessary ornamentation. The fifth century, however, exhibits the basilica as developing so high an adornment of architecture, sculpture, and painting, and so great a variation of ground-plan and accession of subordinate buildings, that we cannot be surprised at its subsequent development by means of transepts and apsidal chapels into the stately form and proportions of the cathedral of Western Europe. If I might venture to hazard a conjecture on the origin of the cruciform church of a later age, I should say that it was suggested by the addition of those side chapels and oratories which formed so marked a feature in the more sumptuous basilical churches, such as that of St. Felix at Nola, of which St. Paulinus has left us so

elaborate and valuable a description. The first great change which the secular basilica received in its conversion into a Christian church was the threefold apse,* which soon developed itself into a still more elaborate system. The single apse was then multiplied so as to make the recesses to equal, or even exceed, the number of the aisles of which they formed the elevated extremity. This triple end, or trichorum, contained a separate altar in every apse, the relics of martyrs being deposited, in the words of St. Paulinus, *intra absidem trichora sub altaria*. Elsewhere he speaks of a central apse "*cum duabus dextrâ lævâque conchulis*," a *concha* being a smaller apse; a *conchula* often an apse within an apse. Pope Hadrian (according to Anastasius Bibliothecarius) "made three apses in the Church of St. Mary in Cosmedin," and we read in the same chronicler that Leo III. made a magnificent central apse in a church in Rome, having two other apses, one on the right side and one on the left. Sometimes in remarkable cases these apses or "conchs" were multiplied. At Milan, the Church of St. Thecla had eight, while the Palace of Justinian at Constantinople boasted of a "heptaconch Triclinium," famous for the abortive conference held in it between the Catholics and the Acephali under that great emperor. On the sides of these apses, and along the aisles of the church, the *cubicula*, or resting-places of the saints, were ordinarily erected. "The *cubicula*, four in number," writes St. Paulinus, "inserted in the long sides or aisles of the basilica supply a place for those who wish to pray or meditate, and for the memorials of the religious who rest there in eternal peace." In a recess such as this, at the side of the north aisle of the ancient Basilica of Lyminge, the body of St. Æthelburga is said to have rested. The word is literally that of the charter of King Cuthred, "*ubi pausat corpus B. Eadburgæ*." And in this northern apse the remains of the arched tomb from which her relics were taken, by Archbishop Lanfranc for the endowment of his new Priory of St. Gregory in Canterbury, may still be clearly seen. The site of the nave of the church, of which the ancient yew-tree appears to me to mark the centre, cannot fail to be detected by the careful observer. The destruction of the walls of this and of the north aisle, both in the churchyard and in the field, was unhappily so complete as to leave little hope, of a successful search, to the explorer of a later day. The work of destruction of the south wall of the church, and of the intermediate one, was only interrupted by the approach to recent interments, which it was thought imprudent to

* Dr. Plumtre has shewn that the chancel of St. Martin's-le-Grand at Dover had a threefold apse. ('Archæologia Cantiana,' vol. iv., plate 5, page 26.)

LYMINGE.

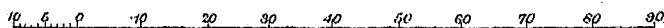
Reduced from the larger Plan.
by

Edmund B. Ferrey Esq^r.^e

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Ancient portion of Churchyard Wall.



disturb; the coffin of a Mrs. Crux presenting what might be called a real *crux* to these modern Vandals, while an accident to a labourer, who broke his leg in attempting to break up the far less brittle foundation, and the honest confession that they had "got stones enow," led to a cessation of the work of Vandalism.

The apse at the Western extremity of the Lyminge basilica, derives some illustration from a basilica built by St. Namatius in Auvergne in the seventh century, of which St. Gregory of Tours writes that "it had a round apse in the front, with wings on either side elegantly constructed," *in ante absidem rotundam habens ab utroque latere ascellas eleganti constructas opere.* (l. ii. c. 16.) The greater part of this, at Lyminge, was destroyed with the vast walls extending from it, and a layer of concrete still adhering to the rock-chalk is the only clue to their form and direction. The fragments which remain enable us, however, to complete the ground-plan which the traditions of the oldest inhabitants verify, and indicate the design and proportions of what must have been one of the largest, as well as one of the most historic, of the early Christian churches of England—the foundation of one who had been present at the consecration of the Cathedral of Canterbury, and had herself founded that wooden church of York which was the predecessor of the great northern minster. Yet much as we must deplore the loss of the "former house," enriched with so many sacred traditions, we cannot but look upon the present venerable building and its long history with the feelings with which St. Paulinus looked from the earlier basilica of Nola to the structure which succeeded it, and exclaim with him—

"Tectorum dissidet ætas
Concordat species—veterum manus atque recentum
Convenit—in facie simili decor unus utrumque
Ornat opus—cœunt olim fundata novellis."