ST. MARTIN'S CHURCH, CANTERBURY.

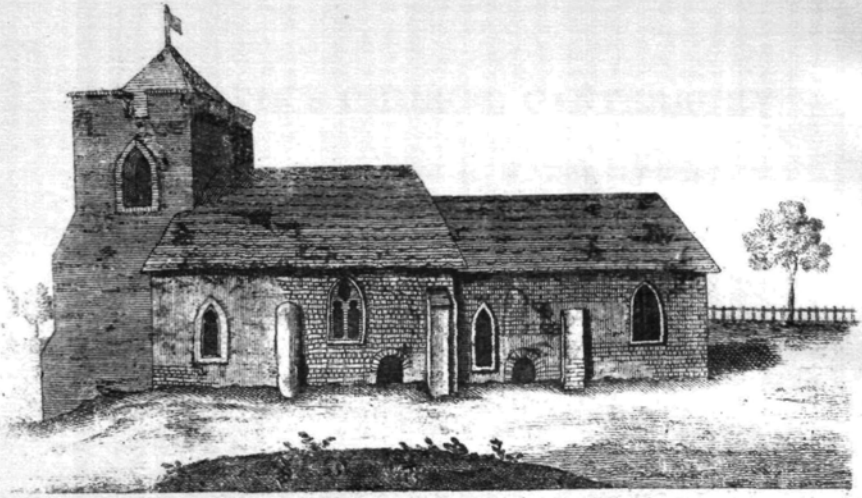
BY THE REV. CANON C. F. ROUTLEDGE.

THE well-known sentence of Bæda, "There was near the city, towards the east, a church built of old in honour of St. Martin while the Romans inhabited Britain," repeated with variations by many after-chroniclers, is the first authentic record of this venerable church. It forms a prelude to an enumeration of historical incidents which time now forbids me to dwell upon, though among various conjectures which I may put forward it would be some satisfaction to rest on the undoubted fact, that this very spot was trodden by the feet of Bertha, sanctified by the masses and preaching of St. Augustine, and (in all probability) witnessed the baptism of Ethelbert, King of Kent.

Not myself a professed archæologist, but imbued with a deep love and reverence for every stone of this building, I would invite, by a brief summary of its architecture and probable history, your careful opinion and discussion on points which do not seem to have ever yet received due attention from this or any other Society.

The original church, allowed to fall into partial ruin after the Roman evacuation of Britain, was probably restored towards the end of the sixth century, to serve as an oratory for Queen Bertha and her attendant Bishop Leotard or Liudhard, and re-dedicated to St. Martin of Tours. And portions of this building are, I would fain think, existing even in the present day.

It is evident at the most cursory glance that the church has suffered from frequent partial destructions and restorations. Windows put in at uneven levels, doorways and porches stopped up here and there, and the irregularity and incongruity of the masonry, all testify to its varied fortunes. There is a perfect mine of wealth for the geologist to be



Erudito viro et Amicissimo Johi Hardy de Nottingham.
Tabulam hanc vovet W. Stukley

St MARTIN'S CHURCH, CANTERBURY, *(SOUTH SIDE)*
IN A.D. 1722

ST MARTIN'S CHURCH near CANTERBURY.
(NORTH SIDE IN A.D. 1791.)

Whiteman & Bass, *Photo-Litho*, London.

found in its walls, as samples of which I would point to Roman tiles, travertine, tertiary sandstone, Kentish rag, Purbeck, red and green sandstone, Caen stone, flint, and doubtless many others.

It is very likely that the Romano-Saxon building suffered from the fierce and general ravages of the Danes. It still however maintained sufficient reputation to have given a title to suffragan bishops for a period of 350 years according to one tradition (at any rate for fifty years), till they finally became merged, in the time of Lanfranc, into Archdeacons of Canterbury.

The interior of the church assumed its present general shape at the end of the twelfth or the beginning of the thirteenth century, though alterations and additions have been made in several succeeding generations.

Of the building as it now stands we may roughly assign the different portions to the following periods:—

(1) *Roman.*—General prevalence of tiles, some of them almost undoubtedly *in situ* in parts of the chancel wall.

(2) *Saxon* or *Pre-Norman.*—The font; the priest's door (six feet high) on south of chancel; traces of another door S.E. of nave, which from measurement I have discovered to be necessarily anterior to the Norman piscina; and large portions of wall masonry of a chequy pattern, *i.e.* square stones with large interstices of sea-shore mortar.

(3) *Norman.*—Probably the buttresses; and a piscina (measuring twenty inches by twelve), said to be the earliest and most complete existing in England, with two holes above it for the supports of the canopy.

(4) *Early English.*—Chancel arch, roof of navè, and blocked porch or door S.W. of the church.

(5) *Fourteenth Century, Decorated.*—The tower; and the single-light windows of the nave.

(6) *Beginning of Fifteenth Century.*—The window over the font, which is clearly half of a former two-light window.

(7) *End of Fifteenth Century.*—The aumbry.

There are a few objects deserving somewhat longer explanation.

(*a*) The early Roman church probably occupied the site

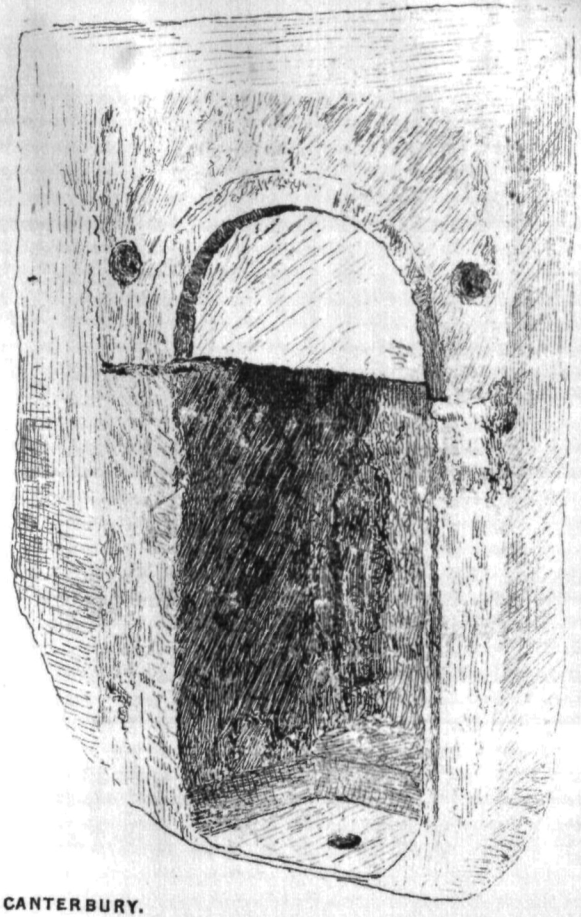
only of the present chancel. It appears to me that we can distinctly trace the point at which the old wall ended and the apse began.

(*b*) I would call special attention to the convex buttress on the south side of the nave. It is very peculiar. It cannot have been a staircase in later times, as there seems to be no reason whatever for a staircase at that particular place in a building of the same size as the present. It is not unlike circular projections in the Saxon towers of Sompting and Brixworth.

There is probably little foundation for the conjecture that the old church might have ended somewhere near this point, and then the buttress might have had something to do with the support of the western front, or have been a staircase up to the old belfry.

(*c*) What some have called the "Leper's Window" on the S.W. of the chancel. Is it a window or a door? If a window, is it *in situ?* or has it been moved there from some other part of the church? It is, in my opinion, a door occupying the place of (if not itself actually) the entrance to the early Roman building. Its component materials argue great antiquity.

(*d*) Last, and most interesting of all, is the font, which is almost unique, being built up of various stones in different tiers. It is circular or tub-shaped, about two feet six inches high, and consists of a rim, three tiers, and a modern base. The three tiers are made up of some twenty-four distinct stones rounded externally and fitted in their place. The lower tier is embellished with a continuous pattern of scroll-work; the second with groups of circles intertwining with one another (what Hasted calls a kind of hieroglyphical true-lovers'-knot), with the exception of one stone which has carved on it six comparatively plain circles; the third tier is of a completely different character, exhibiting arches intersecting one another. At the top is a rim, the ornamentation of which corresponds with that of the two lower tiers, except one part on which there is a kind of dogtooth-work, like stars cut in half. It has been suggested, with great probability, that the outer half of the upper rim's thickness



FONT AND SMALL PISCINA IN ST MARTIN'S CHURCH, CANTERBURY.

(THE FONT IS SHEWN ON A SMALL SCALE; THE PISCINA ON A VERY LARGE SCALE.)

was cut away to form a ledge, on which a tall cover might firmly rest.

The controversy as to the date of this interesting relic is too prolonged to be entered into on the present occasion. The character of the carving naturally suggests at first that it is of the later Norman period. But it does not necessarily follow that the carving is contemporary with the structure of the font; the fact of it being chiselled in a sketchy manner would suggest that it is not. I cannot but think that what I may call the composition of the font (*i.e.* its being built of various stones, laid in an irregular manner) is inconsistent with its alleged Norman date. And it is more than probable that the whole font is Saxon, chiselled out into the present patterns during the eleventh century; nor is it absolutely impossible that it is the very font in which Ethelbert, King of Kent, was baptized.

Finally, among the *miscellanea*, I may mention that the length of the present chancel is about the same as that of the nave, *i.e.* about forty-two feet.

The only monument of any interest in the church is that of Sir John Finch, who was Baron of Fordwich, Chancellor of Queen Henrietta Maria, Speaker of the House of Commons, and Keeper of the Great Seal.

In the pavement close to the altar-rails is a small white cross of a curious character, about eighteen inches long and two inches wide. The lower half of it corresponds with an illustration that appears in Hasted.

Of brasses there is one of the beginning of the sixteenth century in the middle of the passage up the nave, inscribed with the name of Stephen Falkes and Alys his wife. There is also the effigy of Thomas Stoughton, of the date 1591, in the chancel; and another of Michael Fraunces and Jane his wife, who died in 1587.

The bells are three in number. One has no inscription; the second bears the date 1641; and on the third, in old English characters, is, "Sancta Caterina, ora pro nobis."

The registers begin from the year 1662; they contain no entries of interest.

Some Saxon beads have been found in the churchyard, as

well as a gold medal, engraved with the name of Bishop Liudhard, and now deposited in the British Museum.

A chrismatory, or *ampulla*, for holding the consecrated oil, was found on the wall-plate, at the last restoration, about forty years ago. It is probably of the fourteenth century.

The so-called tomb of Queen Bertha is interesting. It can hardly be an Easter tomb, as it is not within the altar-rails. The chamfered slab, covering the sarcophagus, is formed of (perhaps) Portland oolite, a stone certainly rare in Canterbury. It must (if a coffin), from its position in the church, have covered the remains of some distinguished person.

Let me say, in conclusion, that every detail (which want of time has compelled me to sketch thus baldly and briefly) is worthy of consideration and reverence, as connected with a church where the functions of religion were "irradiated (in the words of an old chronicler) by the apostolic life and doctrine of St. Augustine, and by an abundance of miracles"; the "Mother-church of England," as it is called by the late Dean Stanley, who loved it well, who illustrated its history by a graphic picturesqueness of detail, and whose name and memory will never be forgotten by all worshippers at St. Martin's who take to heart his lessons, and to whom "the view from this hillside is still one of the most inspiriting that can be found in the world."