

## ST. MARTIN'S CHURCH, CANTERBURY.



THE FONT.

On the slope of a hill near the monastery of St. Augustine, at Canterbury, stands the little church of St. Martin, one of those ancient landmarks which recall to our mind the earliest teaching of the Christian faith in this country. Although at first appearance it looks like a quaint thirteenth century village church, with its ivy-mantled tower scarcely higher than the roof of the nave, just peeping above the thick black yew trees which surround and protect it; yet, on passing through the lich-gate, and wending your way between the numerous graves, the construction of the walls attracts attention; the layers of thin red bricks and salmon-coloured mortar proclaim it to be the very earliest church in this country built for Christian worship, and one of the oldest Christian churches existing.

The *Saxon Chronicle* tells us: "In the year 167, Lucius, King of Britain, sent letters to Elutherius praying that he might be made a Christian, and his request was fulfilled," and Christianity was preached, sometimes openly under the protection of the State, and at others persecuted, according to the feelings of the Roman governors.

During the occupation of Britain by Rome the church of St. Martin was built, and Christianity was preached within its walls, to blossom forth but a short time. Rome having to withdraw its troops, the hand of the law was weakened, and the country left a prey to the incursions of the Picts and Scots and internal warfare. Finally, the Saxons, who were introduced to protect the Britons, turned against them, driving them out of the greater part of the country. So the early Christian Church was blotted out, and England was handed over to the barbaric paganism of the Saxon race, save here and there where some true servant of the Cross gathered round him a few remnants of the ancient flock, who had remained true to Christ in spite of the oppressors.

hand; so he made proposals to Charibert, King of Paris, for the hand of his daughter Bertha.

Now Bertha had already lived a romantic life; her father, Charibert, being a man of evil temper, behaved so badly to his queen, Ingoberga, and his daughter, that they fled from Paris, and sought protection of Gregory, Bishop of Tours. Here Bertha had been educated and brought up in the Christian faith. So having lived a life of exile, her fear of leaving France soon gave way to a noble desire of converting Ethelbert, whom she knew by report to be a man of noble instincts, and far in

advance of the rest of the Saxons. She consulted her tutor, Luidhard, who had brought her up from a child; he asked her if she had strength enough to persevere in the true faith amongst infidels and idolaters.

Bertha answered, "Not only do I trust that I shall remain faithful to my God and Saviour, but I hope I may be the cause of bringing Ethelbert and his followers to give up idolatry, and worship the true God;" and, asking Luidhard if he would accompany her, and be her chaplain, she sent word to Ethelbert that she would marry him if he would allow her to practise the Christian religion.

When Ethelbert received her answer he was much struck with her piety; and so Bertha came to England, and was married to Ethelbert; and he presented her with the little Roman church on the hill, in which she might worship according to her faith; which she dedicated to St. Martin, the patron saint of Tours, where she had lived in exile. And after so many years was the Christian faith for the second time enshrined within this building, and the gentle and romantic queen came daily to pray within its walls.

Ethelbert and his followers were so impressed by the piety of Bertha and her chaplain, that the seeds of Christianity were planted, and the way paved for the arrival of Augustine and his companions. So in the year 597, when Ethelbert received news that a number of pious men had arrived in the Isle of Thanet, he gave way to Queen Bertha's entreaties, and went out to receive them.

After having heard what their mission was, he returned them the gracious and characteristic answer: "Your words and promises are all very good and fair, and it may be your doctrine is much better than what we believe to be true here in England; yet I cannot agree rashly to believe those things you say, and to think untrue those things which I have so long

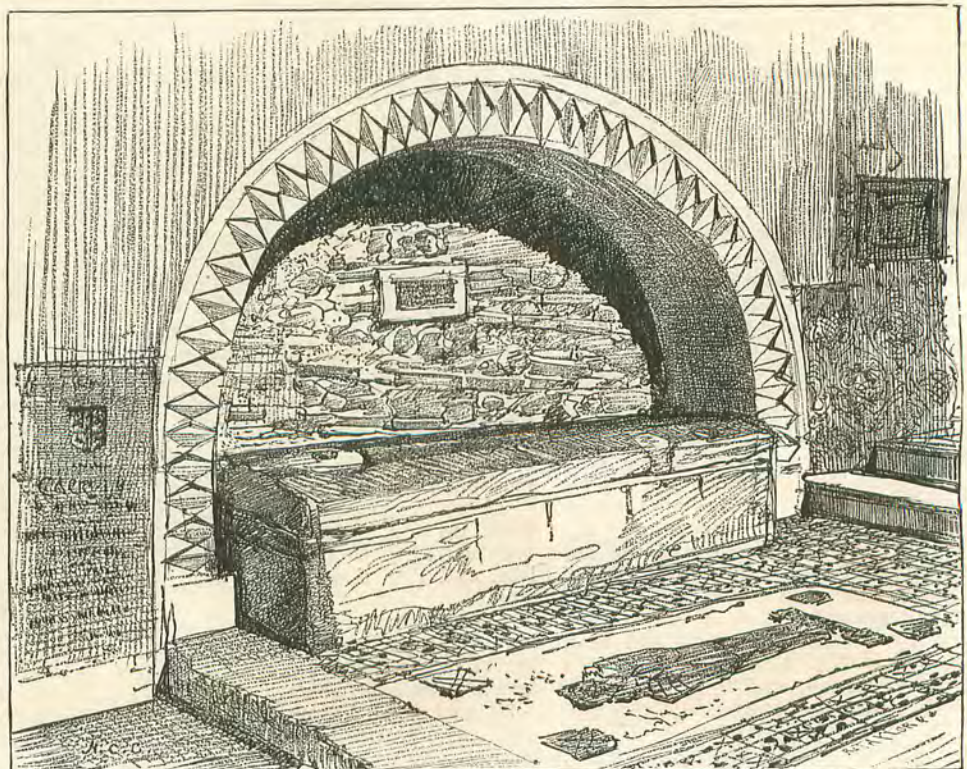
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STONE SAXON COFFIN.



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believed, and which all my people believe with me. But as you came such a great way to teach us better things, as you think, and to make us wiser and happier, you shall have from me harbour and refuge and sufficient maintenance; and, moreover, I will grant you that you may preach freely all you know concerning God and His Son Jesus Christ, and convert as many as you can to your doctrine."

Augustine and his companions heard these words with joy, and they set out in procession to Canterbury, the chief city of Ethelbert, passing on their way the little church of St. Martin, where Queen Bertha was accustomed to pray; who was no doubt waiting to receive them, and hand over St. Martin's to their use, as King Ethelbert had given to them a house close by, on the site of what was afterwards the monastery of St. Augustine.

At St. Martin's, Augustine commenced to preach his mission to the people of England; and many of those who came to hear him were much struck with the doctrines of Christianity. Amongst these was Ethelbert, who, although at first very reluctant to give up idolatry, gave way to the entreaties of Bertha, and went to hear the Word of God preached by Augustine. Upon comparing the pure and noble religion of Christianity with the barbarous worship of his ancestors, he determined to forsake idolatry, and be baptised.

With how much joy must Queen Bertha have received this news; with how much fervour must she have offered up a thanksgiving to God, who had so signally answered her prayers; and what a day of rejoicing must have been the feast of Pentecost, June 2, 597, the day on which King Ethelbert, with many

nobles, was baptised by Augustine in the little church of St. Martin. The font in which it is said he was baptised still exists, and is a very curious example of Saxon work. So the third great event of Christianity was enacted within the walls of this little church.

The baptism of Ethelbert was soon followed by that of many thousands of his subjects. Although Christianity was in no way forced upon the people, yet the pagan priests found themselves deserted, and eastern England became a Christian country. Naturally it had many enemies, who preferred living the barbarous lives of savages than lives of virtue and self-restraint. Yet Christianity never left the kingdom, and from that day the Primate of All England has sat in the seat of St. Augustine, as Archbishop over the same diocese—that of Canterbury.

During the reign of Ethelbert, Augustine commenced the monastery of St. Peter and St. Paul, afterwards known as St. Augustine's. From this time St. Martin's settled down to a quiet existence; and although it was renewed and enlarged in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it began to be, and is to this day, a monument of the early struggles and victories of Christianity.

On entering the church the general effect is rich and impressive, yet it shows less of the ancient work than the exterior. Here and there, where the plaster-work is chipped away, the old Roman masonry is brought to view, and a very interesting Roman doorway is left bare, greatly contrasting with the smoother work of modern times. In a dark corner, on the south side as you enter, is King Ethelbert's font, the stone having been so bleached by age that it looks almost like silver.

Passing on beyond the sharp-pointed thirteenth-century chancel arch, on the north side, one finds a large stone Saxon coffin, said to be that of Queen Bertha. The pavement here is very interesting, and is probably Roman mosaic. Let us leave the interior, and return to the churchyard, which with its carpet of verdure, rich colour, and scent of flowers, is a perfect Garden of Eden. All the beauties of nature here adorn this resting-place of the dead, and as it is on the slope of a hill, commands a fine view of the valley of the Stour.

Within a few yards of the cemetery is the old grey wall of St. Augustine's, but the monastery has long since gone. In the sixteenth century it became a palace, later on a farmhouse, and at the present time some of the buildings have been rebuilt for the purpose of educating missionaries. In the middle of the valley stands the cathedral, on the site of the one erected by St. Augustine, crowned by the grand central tower, breaking through the lines of the distant hills, with its pinnacles clearly defined against the western sky. This noble tower, one of the last great efforts of the art of the Middle Ages, although pictured with romance and grey with age, is but a child compared with the little church we have just left, as Christianity had been preached more than eleven centuries in St. Martin's before the Bell Harry tower was built. While, however, we glory in the magnificent cathedrals and churches with which piety has adorned our land, let us not forget the humble little building within which Christianity was first preached to our Anglo-Saxon forefathers.

H. C. B.

## THE BLESSING OF THE ROSE-LEAVES.

A LARGE pleasant room in an old-fashioned house on the outskirts of London. A young wife, looking very pale and worn, sits working, while her husband, still in early manhood, lies on a bed of sickness; his fine intelligent countenance has the wan weary look of prostration, as he lies very still, with closed eyes, and neither speaks nor moves.

There is one more occupant of the room, a blue-eyed boy of three years old, who has just run up to his mother with the cry, "Me so hungry."

A look of almost agonised pain passes over the young mother's face. But she says cheerfully, "Never mind, Archie dear, mother will get him something soon; come and look at mamma's pretty box."

Then going to a chest of drawers she brings forth an old-fashioned carved box, full of childish treasures, which somehow, through all their troubles, had been preserved; and lifting her boy into a high chair, places it before him, hoping it will take his attention from his hunger till she can get him some food. Then she applies herself again to her weary task, which she knows will bring her in very little, yet which she must strive to finish, or her loved ones will perish.

A few moments of almost perfect stillness; the gentle breathing of the prostrate man can just be heard, and the click of his wife's needle, when a baby voice is heard, "'Ook, mamma, 'ook!—p'etty, p'etty!"

And the young wife looks up to see a bright sovereign held between the baby fingers. She glances at it again to see if it can really be true, and then from the revulsion of feeling would have fallen, had not the door at that moment opened, and a man of about fifty,

with a kind, expressive countenance and a quick intelligent eye, entered.

In a moment he took in the situation, and with a few rapid strides was quick enough noiselessly to lift her drooping form and lay her on the sofa; then taking a glass of wine that was put ready for her husband, he held it to her lips, saying, "Drink, my child." She obeyed at once, for this young wife, though possessing great force of intellect and powers of endurance, was very simple and childlike in character, and at once yielded to lawful authority.

As soon as he saw she had a little revived, the doctor—for he it was—left the room, and calling "Mrs. Dundas!" was immediately answered by, "Yes, sir!" For the landlady was never very far distant while the doctor was visiting his patient.

"Please send round to my house at once," he said, "and ask Miss Jessie to put up the cold chicken, and anything else she can find, and bring it round to me here directly."

Then he returned to the kind of bed-sitting room where he had left his patients, and stood at the window watching and thinking sorrowfully of all that these young people had endured. He himself was rich and very kind-hearted, and had suspected they were poor, though he had never dreamed there was real want till he had quietly laid his finger on her wrist, and felt how feeble and fluttering was the pulse. He had been trying to think of ways of helping them, but it was not easy to do so; the great reserve and quiet dignity of the young wife made it very difficult to approach the subject; and besides, when she was talking of her husband, her interest and desire to know just what she was to do gave a temporary

energy and appearance of strength which deceived even the practised eye of the skilful physician. Again, her husband never wanted for anything; grapes, wine, all that he could need, were always placed beside him or ready at hand; and, indeed, it was only within the last few days that the want had been so great, for the loving wife and mother had managed to save a little money in the days of comparative prosperity, and this, carefully eked out, together with the proceeds of her work, had sufficed to keep them from actual want. But now the heart of this truly good man and faithful follower of Christ bled to think of the suffering the emaciated form of the young mother indicated, and to behold the pinched, pale face of the little one. He had not often seen the child, who was generally at play in an adjoining room during his visits, and who had indeed learned "to endure hardness" at an early age.

But not for long did he muse thus; soon a bright girlish voice was heard asking in gentle tones—"May I come in, papa?" and as he rapidly crossed the room to welcome her, he was met by the loving, grateful glance of the girl who had heard so much of these patients of her father's, and was so longing to help them.

In a few moments a dainty meal was ready; but with true womanly instinct Jessie felt that her boy would be the mother's first care, so sitting him up to table, she placed before him a delicate milk pudding, which she herself had prepared—she always liked to have something ready at a moment's notice. She was accustomed to the sudden messages, "Send something at once."

But the little one, hungry though he was,