

OBSERVATIONS ON THE REMAINS OF THE
BASILICA OF LYMINGE.BY THE REV. CANON R. C. JENKINS, M.A.,
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THE Church of Lyminge is the only one which in the Saxon charters of the seventh and following centuries is designated a *basilica*; and this distinctive characteristic leads to the belief that it presented in that earliest period of our Christianity the peculiar features of the basilical churches, viz., the threefold division and the western apse, which we see preserved in the great churches founded by Constantine in the Eastern and Western capitals. Of these the learned work of Ciampini, *De sacris aedificiis a Constantino Magno Constructis* (Rom., 1693), gives a full and illustrated description. Before the time of that great emperor, the buildings devoted to Christian worship went chiefly by the name of *Conventicula*, "*domus Dei*," or *Ecclesiae*; though it is probable that some portion of the secular buildings of a basilical character were assigned to the Christians during the periods of toleration and endowment which preceded the actual establishment of their faith in the Empire. Ammianus Marcellinus mentions the "*basilica Siccini*" as a place "*ubi ritus Christiani est conventiculum*" (l. 27), probably indicating the town of Siccignano, which constituted one of the many dukedoms of the great house of Caracciolo.

In the two charters of Wihtraed (697—715) the church is described as the "*Basilica B. Mariae Genetricis Dei quae sita est in loco qui dicitur Limingae*." The only other passage in which a "*basilica*" is mentioned at this early period is in the charter of King Ini in 704, (marked by Kemble as of somewhat doubtful authenticity,) which is said to have

“been publicly delivered and confirmed *in ligned basilicâ,*” words which clearly refer to a secular building; the church to which the grant is made being described as an *Ecclesia* in the earlier part of the document.

St. Augustine (in his Questions on Exodus, l. ii. c. v.) appears to refer rather to the secular than to the ecclesiastical basilica, when he writes, “Let us now consider the number of the columns, in which we may advert upon the form of the Tabernacle, whether it was square or round, or had an oblong quadrature, with longer sides and shorter ends—a form in which most basilicas are constructed.” It is true that in one or two instances circular churches in Rome are named *basilicas* (as the Church of St. Constantia), but this was only when they were founded upon ancient baptistries, the form of which was always circular. The oblong form, and its three divisions and apse at the western end, were the characteristic attributes of the Christian basilicas of the earliest period.

The basilical foundations at Lyminge, to which Sir Gilbert Scott in his *Lectures on Architecture* has directed the attention of the student of ecclesiastical buildings, as throwing light upon their earliest history in England, belong to two distinct periods. This was first clearly pointed out by his more learned son, Mr. Gilbert Scott, in his *History of Church Architecture*, while investigating the character of those primitive churches which have been succeeded by the grand cathedrals of a later age. As the only fragment remaining in England of the foundations of a basilical church, his attention was directed to it as illustrating the kindred church of Canterbury, with which, in all its history, the Monastery of Lyminge was so closely connected. Of the original metropolitical cathedral, which was early removed to give place to the Norman structure, not a fragment remains, and the descriptions given of it by Goscelinus and other writers are not sufficiently clear to enable us to draw out its form or proportions. The fullest description of a building of this kind, especially in its more developed form, is very difficult to produce in a ground-plan, and this is singularly illustrated in the elaborate account of the

great Tyrian basilica given us by Eusebius, and in the minute description of the double basilica founded by St. Paulinus at Nola in honour of his predecessor St. Felix. Yet the clear understanding of the form and divisions of the ancient basilical churches is indispensably necessary to the student of church building in every later age. For the modern cathedral is but the development of the simple basilica of Nicene Christianity, when imperial buildings of a secular character were transferred to the uses of the newly adopted faith. I will not enter here upon the question whether, or in what degree, the Roman forensic basilica gave its form and proportions to the Christian temple—a connection which is altogether repudiated by Zestermann in his learned treatise, *De Basilicis*. Many buildings of a public character in Rome were thus designated, and the word in imperial times became attached to royal residences, in which public functions and ceremonies were performed. Such buildings we know from our own historians were devoted by the Saxon kings, on their conversion, to Christian purposes, and constituted the earliest Christian temples of our land. Taking for our guide the third part of the exhaustive treatise of Zestermann, which treats on the Christian basilicas, we are reminded that in order “to have a right idea of the plan of the building, we must bear in mind that its area was quadrangular, forming a parallelogram, whose breadth was about a third part of its length (as may be seen by the diagrams given by Zestermann), and that in the most ancient times it always consisted of these three parts :

“I. The entrance or vestibule (*aditus*, *πρόπυλον*).

“II. The atrium or paradise (*parvis*).

“III. The temple itself (the *ναὸς*).

“To these parts of the area, which one may call the essential ones, two others were added afterwards, which were less necessary :

“IV. The apse (a semicircular projection placed in the wall opposite to the entrance (or *aditus*), and therefore on the western side of the building), and

“V. The transverse passage or *ambulatio*, which extended in front of the apse.”

Thus we have three original features, and two of a later date. To the greater development of these two latter we must ascribe the present cruciform cathedrals and churches; the choir or chancel being the development of the apse, while the transverse *ambulatio* in front of the apse extended itself so as to form transepts. A cruciform appearance was thus given to the plan, which in its origin had no reference whatever to a cross, but sprang out of the lateral projections which were given to the basilica in consequence of the transverse ambulatory, which appears to have originated from the greater pomp attending the celebrations at the altar, and the processions which the presence of a large body of the clergy, whose seats were placed around the apse, introduced and almost rendered necessary.

But another and a very important change resulted from the relaxation and final abolition of the ancient penitential discipline of the Church which had rendered the threefold division of the church necessary in order to separate the classes of worshippers—the penitents, the catechumens, and the faithful, which last were alone admitted to the full privileges of their church-membership. If you look on the plan of an Eastern basilica, as given by Bishop Beveridge in his *Synodicon*, and by other writers, you will at once see that when the elaborate divisions made in the congregation by the severe penitential discipline of the Church were removed, the form of the building would undergo a similar change; and hence in the more recent basilicas even the atrium was dispensed with. Thus we are told by Zestermann that the churches of St. Maria Trastevere, Sta. Agnese, and Sta. Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome, though originally built with *atria*, were deprived of them in a later day.

It has been already intimated that basilical churches were almost always built towards the west, the apse being on that side and the entrance at the east. This is the case with the great basilical churches in Rome, as the Lateran, St. Peter's, Sta. Maria Maggiore, St. Paul (fuori le mura), and almost all the great historic churches in the city. This distinctive feature separates the basilical church from its mediæval successors, and, we might add, separates also the

two foundations at Lyminge as completely as the masonry and concrete distinguish the two structures. A Plan of our Basilica at Lyminge is shewn in *Archæologia Cantiana*, Vol. X., opposite p. cii. In the fragment adjoining the church we have an eastern apse, which undoubtedly belongs to the work of Ethelburga in 633, while the building in the field (now added to the churchyard) exhibits the remains of a great western apse, with fragments of walls exactly corresponding in position to those of the early basilicas. In the building adjoining the church there were innumerable fragments of materials taken from a still earlier one—portions of Roman roof-tiles, and squared stones, some of them being of an oolite which has never been found in this neighbourhood, except in the Roman work at Dover, and the pillars from Reculver, now at Canterbury. The long stones at the bottom of the foundation of the other work had no mortar or concrete between them; but layers of chalk were interposed to form a bed for the upper ones. The larger squared stones were connected by a concrete of extraordinary rudeness and coarseness, which seemed merely intended to fill up the crevices between them. The apse is built of fragments of Kentish rag united by a concrete of the very hardest character, and formed of the purest lime without any of that admixture of Roman brick which characterizes Ethelburga's foundations.

In the time of my predecessor there were considerable remains of the walls above ground, as well as vast foundations extending under the churchyard towards the house. These were used as a quarry for building purposes, and all the walls and offices of the adjacent farm were built with them, as well as the wall along the road above the stream. On this ancient foundation Lanfranc, when he took possession of the manor as a part of his separate estate, erected the *Aula* or *Camera* de Lyminge—the ancient court-lodge which gives name to the field, and here his successors took up their occasional residence. Archbishop Boniface was here in 1260. But the most brilliant occasion of its occupation was that on which Archbishop Peckham in 1279 came to it to receive the homage of the great Earl Gilbert de

Clare of Gloucester, which is described in the first page of his Register at Lambeth, the earliest of the Archbishop Registers now existing. Archbishop Winchelsea and others resided here for brief periods subsequently, but in the time of Archbishop Arundel it had fallen into a ruined state. The Commission which was held at Lyminge in the year 1396, on his attainder, reported that the dwelling, or manor-house, consisted *in domibus ruinosis*.

The dilapidation thus described was occasioned from the fact that Archbishop Courtenay, his predecessor, had obtained a licence from the crown and the monastery of Christ Church in Canterbury to pull down some of his manor-houses, in order to repair and rebuild the Castle of Saltwood. This manor-house at Lyminge, as the nearest of such houses, was therefore left in a ruined state, and doubtless contributed some of the materials for the improvements made at Saltwood Castle. But as, by a special clause in the licence thus granted, the use of the stones was chiefly reserved for the nearest churches or chapels, we are enabled to see in these foundations the quarry out of which the stones were taken for the building of the tower from the year 1470, or earlier, until it was completed in 1527. These stones exactly resemble in form and description the foundation-stones we see before us, and the upper ones appear to have been built from the stones of the apse, as they are of the same size, and encrusted with the same concrete. In excavating the foundations, numerous fragments of the Archbishop's Hall or Chamber were found—large stone corbels, numerous encaustic tiles of various patterns, some apparently of the fourteenth, others of the fifteenth century; the latter forming large circular patterns with roses within them, others representing rude fleurs-de-lys, and some a kind of fretwork pattern.

Of the life and work of Ethelburga and her last resting-place, I will only quote the graceful words of the late Comte de Montalembert in his classic work, *Les Moines d'Occident*:

“The first and most historic of the princesses descended from Hengist, whom we meet with in cloistered life, is none

other than the gentle and devoted Ethelburga, whose eventful history is so closely bound up with that of the first scenes (*des debuts*) of Christianity in Northumberland. Daughter of the first Christian king of the south of England, she married the first Christian king of the north, that Edwin, whose conversion was so difficult, whose reign was so prosperous, and whose death so glorious. After the sudden ruin of this primitive Northumbrian Christianity, which, with the Bishop Paulinus, she had initiated, the Queen Ethelburga, having been received with tender sympathy by her brother the King of Kent, claimed no other crown than that of a holy poverty. She obtained from her brother the gift of an ancient Roman villa, situated between Canterbury and the sea, on the side which looks towards France. There she founded a monastery, and herself took the veil. She was thus the first widow of the Saxon race who dedicated herself to the religious life. The ancient church of her monastery, named Lyminge, exists still, where is shewn the site of the tomb of her who passed here the last fourteen years of her life, and who, as daughter of the founder of Canterbury, and widow of the founder of York, constitutes the first link between the two great homes of Catholic life among the Anglo-Saxons."—(Tom. v., Ed. 4^{me}, p. 272.)

To this bond of union between the two primacies, whose struggles for pre-eminence belong to a less primitive age, I called the attention of the late Archbishop Longley (then Archbishop of York) on the first meeting of our Society in this place.

But there was another and a stranger union—that, namely, between the nunnery and the monastery of Lyminge—a kind of union which prevailed in England and Ireland from the seventh to the close of the eighth century, and this foundation, as most others of the same period, was a double one; so that we must expect to find, under the same conventual roof, two churches, and for their support a double endowment. The first donation of the surrounding lands to the nunnery was earlier than any of the written charters, which convey the estates to the abbot and monks. But there is a later charter (that granted to the Abbess

Selethrytha) conveying land in Canterbury to the nunnery, and dated in 804. It appears that the nuns were then, in order to escape the Danish invasions, removed to Canterbury, while the monastery continued until 965, in which year it was incorporated with Christchurch, and the church then made secular and parochial rebuilt by St. Dunstan. This prelate was especially opposed to the system of double foundations, and as the Benedictine rule, in its stricter form, was revived by him, this strange development of it was "buried," as Montalembert observes, "in the common ruin of the Danish destruction"—"*Il s'urent ensevelis dans cette catastrophe.*" The consolidation of the monasteries in the principal cities was rendered necessary by the dangers of their exposure to the constant inroads of the Danes, in one of which we read that nearly all the monks of Lyminge were slain, after making a vigorous resistance. The numerous bones which were found in the adjacent field gave evidence of this calamity, which occurred about the year 850. In the year 1085 the relics of St. Ethelburga and her niece, St. Mildretha (whose identity of name with her greater namesake of Thanet led to the long controversy between the monks of St. Augustine and those of St. Gregory), were removed by Lanfranc to Canterbury, where they were received with great pomp by the Primate, and laid on either side of the altar of St. Gregory's. Thus the distinctive title of the place as "*Limming ubi pausat corpus beatae Eladburgae,*" which occurs in several of the early charters, became a thing of the past, and her name survives only in the rededication of the church, and in the well which from early times has borne and still bears it. Perhaps it is to this unfailing supply of pure water that we may attribute the selection of this spot as the scene of Ethelburga's foundation.

I may add here, in support of the conclusion (indicated by Mr. Gilbert Scott, and confirmed by my own observation), that we have here two distinct buildings, the fact that while the work I ascribe to Ethelburga is built only of materials derived from the place (flints, ironstone, etc.) mixed with shingle and shells, such as would be easily procurable even in that earlier day, the work of the supposed monastic church

is built out of the large blocks of Kentish rag, which could only be obtained from the estates in Saltwood, Hythe, and other places where Kentish rag is found, which devolved upon the monks between 700 and the period of the dissolution of their establishment. It may be further observed that the inclusion of two churches under one roof was not unknown at any period. The famous Basilica of Nola, so minutely described by its founder, St. Paulinus (of which I furnished a description in Mr. Gilbert Scott's learned treatise), forms an early instance of such a practice in a non-monastic building, while the recent controversy on the Duke of Norfolk's rights in the Church of Arundel developed a mediæval instance of the same usage in a church of a mixed character. I accordingly directed the attention of Lord Coleridge, while the suit was pending, to the earlier instance of the Basilica of Nola.