

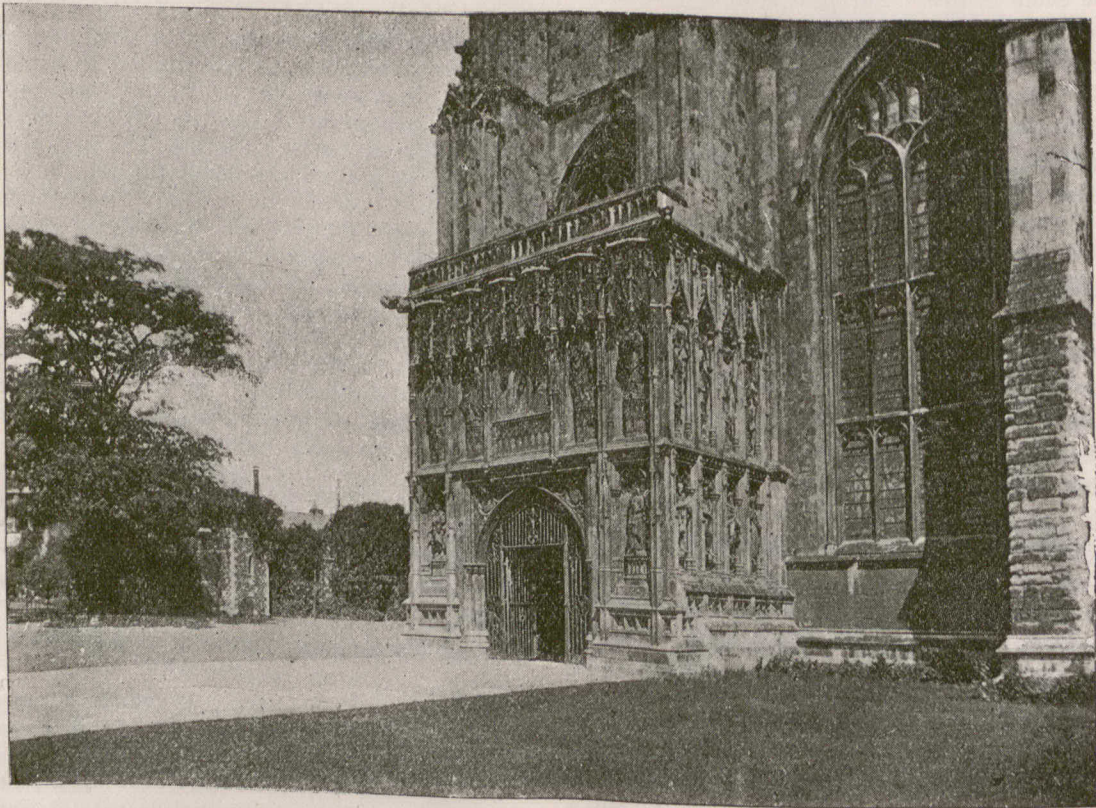
THE LITTLE CHURCH OF ST. MARTIN.*

BY FRED. T. HODGSON.



We have abundant evidence that during the Roman occupation of England, many primitive Christians practised their faith in that country, and there is good reason to suppose that in many parts of the country, particularly where the Roman soldiers were stationed, the followers of the cross were numerous enough to require a place to worship in. The policy of Rome, within the sphere of her influence, was one of extreme tolerance in matters of religion. This policy of tolerance enabled her to mass together in her legions all manner of creeds and nationalities, and her rule was felt less oppressive when she did not interfere with the worship of the people she

to have been a place for Christian worship, and tradition has for hundreds of years given these ruins the name of Lucius' Chapel. In the year 292 A.D., during Diocletian's reign, an old chronicler tells us that "the pious Alban was martyred and many churches were destroyed and holy men slaughtered." St. Alban was the first British martyr. He gave name to a city, and to hundreds of churches. With his death we have many monkish legends; it is said that the river Thames dried up at his approach to the place of martyrdom, and according to Gildas, although Bede's authorities are content to make the miracle occur at the stream between the city and hill of execution—a spring bursts forth from the spot—the eyes of the executioner fall out, and many other wonderful things occur. St. Athanasius, in the middle of the fourth century, speaks of British bishops being present at his trial at the Council of Sardis. Three British bishops are recorded to have been at the Council of Arles, A.D. 314. Apart from



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conquered. The little church of St. Martin stands today in evidence of this toleration, as it has been proved beyond a doubt, that the building was first erected for a place of Christian worship and that its origin dates back to the pre-Saxon period. Without entering deeply into the subject of the presence of Christians in England during the Roman occupation, I may be allowed to make a few quotations, in order to strengthen the claims I am putting forward, that Christian churches were built as places of worship whilst the invaders remained in the country. So early a date as the year 150 A.D., is assigned by authorities whom Bede follows, for King Lucius' request to Pope Eleutherus to "make him a Christian," and this is taken as a commencement of Christianity in England. The dates given do not accord;—and the existence of King Lucius at all has yet to be proved. But, on the cliffs of Dover, and within the lines of the old Roman fortifications, are the remains of a very ancient building whose outlines or plan prove it

the many references made by Roman and native writers to the Christians in England, we also have hundreds of archaeological proofs that cannot be well contradicted. There are in the British and other museums in the country many evidences of Christianity in the shape of symbols on Roman jewelry, such as crosses, the trefoil, and many other indications of early Christian beliefs. Without going into all the reasons proving this church to be of Roman origin, I may state that when the Saxon King of Kent, Ethelbert, took his French bride, the gentle Bertha, to his Saxon home, about the year 590, she found many of her co-religionists there. It is on record that before leaving her French home, she had stipulated in the marriage agreement that she be permitted to practice her own faith, and that she take with her to her new home her Bishop and Confessor. Ethelbert, who, though a pagan, was a reasonable man, granted all she desired and placed at her disposal a little church, which at one time had been used for pagan worship, but now served as a Christian church. Quoting a well known passage in the Venerable Bede's Ec-

*A paper read before the Collingwood Fortnightly Club.

†The paper was illustrated by lime-light views of the Church of St. Martin, and of the great cathedral.