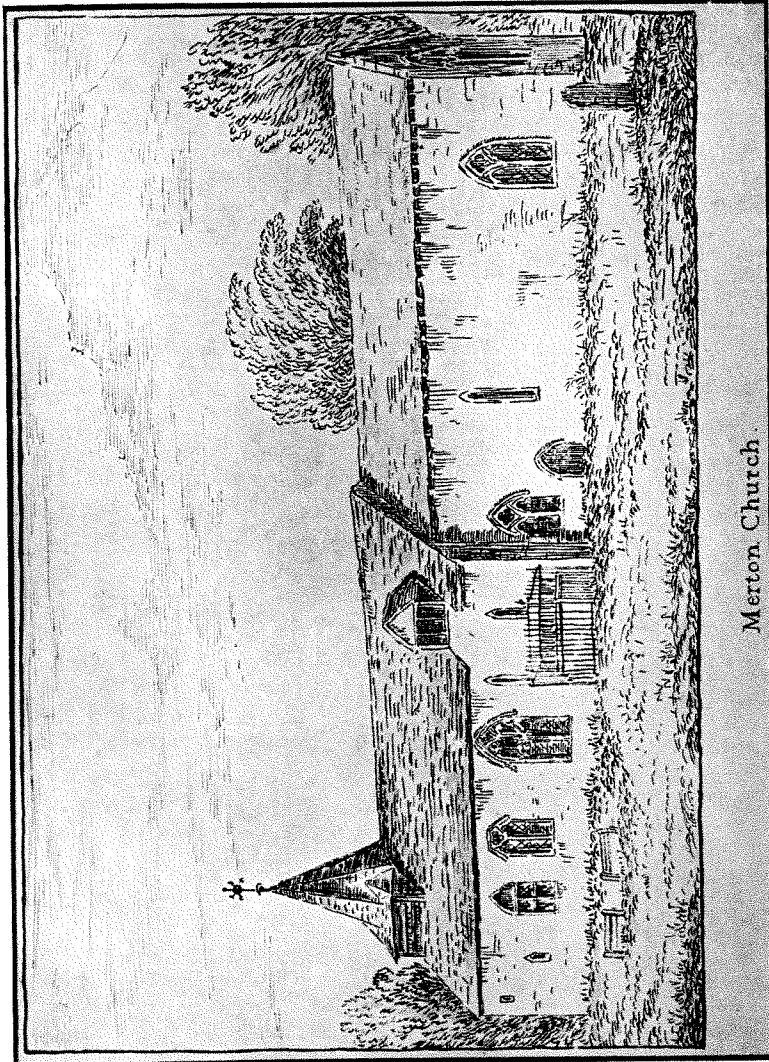


## MERTON CHURCH

**T**HE Domesday Book gives the earliest extant record of a sacred building in the Parish of 'Meretone,' in these two words, '*Ibi ecclesia.*' These words always signify in this survey a church with the great tithes, that is a Rectory. Where, or by whom this Saxon church was built we do not know. After the Norman Conquest it seems to have disappeared, either through neglect or fire, or for some other cause. Lysons tells us,\* quoting from the Arundel MS., 28 (College of Arms), that when Henry I. granted the manor of Merton to Gilbert the Norman, the latter liberally built a church there at his own cost, *before which time the inhabitants were obliged to carry their dead to the adjacent villages.*† Hence, the natural inference is that the older church mentioned in Domesday, as serving the Parish thirty years previously, no longer existed.

\* Environs of London, Vol. I., page 246.

† I have examined the MS., in the hope of verifying these words, but could not decipher it.



Merton Church.

(From LYSON'S 'ENVIRONS OF LONDON,' 1792.)

This old MS., which purports to be written by a spectator of what he narrates, tells how Sheriff Gilbert, the founder and patron, continued actively occupied for the benefit of the place, having built the church free handedly, had it handsomely decorated with paintings and images, as was customary, and, magnificently caused it to be dedicated to the honour of the Most Blessed Mother of God and ever Blessed Mary. For the consecration, William Gifford, Bishop of Winchester (1107-1128), came over, and was received with great hospitality. On his way an event occurred, which was held to be a presage of the future. He met a certain boy who, for theft, was condemned to be deprived of his eyesight; whereupon the Bishop, with the intervention of his Pastoral staff (*i.e.*, his episcopal authority), rescued him from this imminent peril; by which deed, therefore, he foreshadowed that in the place which he came to consecrate many should be rescued from darkness of vice, and be brought by the power of discipline to the light of justice. The Bishop, having completed the work by the consecration of the cemetery, returned to his other duties.\*

The question naturally arises, have we, in the existing building, any portions remaining

\* Heales' Records of Merton Priory, page 3.

which can be ascribed, with some degree of certainty, as belonging to this church, built by Gilbert the Norman, in 1115? Lysons, who examined the church in 1792, before the south and north aisles were added, the nave being long and narrow, like the present chancel, says, 'From the style of architecture of the present church, there is little doubt of its being the original structure, and that it has undergone little alteration.\*' Dr. Manning wrote of this church, about the same period, 'The Parochial church, dedicated to St. Mary, hath the appearance of great antiquity; and is, probably, the same, or a part, at least, of the same, that is said to have been standing there at the time of the General Survey' (1086). 'It consists at present of a nave only, with the chancel, being built of flints with a coat of plaster, showing a small spire covered with shingles, issuing out of the roof at the west end.†' Nothing now remains of the Saxon church, and we can only ascribe with confidence the Norman doorway to Gilbert's time, with, perhaps, the inner walls of the west end. Mr. Johnson says 'The doorway on the north side of the nave, which can be dated, with some degree of certainty, to 1121, still

\* Vol. I., page 346.

† Manning and Bray's History of Surrey, page 259.

retains the original door, covered with scrolled straps and nails, and with C-shaped hinges.\* It seems more probable, however, that the door, with its beautiful wrought-iron work, belongs to the next century, to which period also the Priest's door in the chancel may be assigned.

This north doorway, under the porch, deserves most careful attention. It is said to be 'one of the best specimens of Norman architecture we possess in this country' (Style). Before the north aisle was added in 1866 the doorway stood, as the old plans show, in a line with the present north wall of the belfry, about 11 feet from the west arch. Then the door space was wider, for we notice that its shafts do not now support any part of the arch, or of the tympanum, the solid stone which fills the arch. The columns have been re-built closer together than they stood originally, and, probably, the doorway was more deeply recessed, and had inner jambs, which carried the tympanum. The arch is composed of two semi-circular dog-tooth mouldings of bold pattern; the higher pointing outwards, and the lower downwards, separated by a plain roll moulding. The key-stone, much worn, bears traces of a carved figure. The capitals of the pillars are

\* Victoria County History of Surrey, Vol. II., page 441.

square and under-cut with simple lines. The oak door is 4ft. 6in. in width, while the actual doorway only measures 3ft. 1in. Of the thirteen iron straps on the door, only the bottom one is complete, having both its curved ends in a single piece. There is no drip-stone running round the arch, as would be expected, but this is rendered unnecessary by the porch. How much of the wood-work of the porch is really old it is difficult now to say, because it has all been painted. These wholly timber porches, as here, and at Elstead and at West Horsley, belong to the 14th century. The tracery on the sides, and over the entrance, with the grotesque head, is finely carved, showing a master's hand, while the heavier timbers of the archway, not so well finished, may have been a later restoration. The west doorway, with its moulded label or drip-stone, and carved heads, its cavetto or hollow-moulded jambs, deserves attention. It is an insertion belonging to the 14th century, and has a Norman-looking arch behind.

The oldest and most beautiful portion of the interior is the chancel. Gilbert's church of 1115 appears to have been re-modelled about 1200, and it is to this period that the present chancel belongs, as would the long, narrow nave also, which remained untouched until

1856 on the south, and until 1866 on the north side. Notice the arcades of four arches on each side, built in the walls, with plain chamfered quoin-stones and chamfered labels. It is remarkable that these labels on the north side gradually rise higher at the intersection of the arches as they approach the east end. At first sight this blind arcading suggests a provision for future enlargement of the chancel by building out side-chapels, as at Eynesford, Kent, and elsewhere, where similar arches and columns are ready to be opened. At Merton the north-west arcade has been utilized for the organ chamber. But when it is considered how narrow the piers between the arches would have been, only six inches in width, it seems evident that the recesses here were not intended for side-chapels, but were built for architectural effect alone. There is no trace of the arch on the exterior wall.

Mr. Street, the well-known architect, had a theory that Merton, Merstham, Chipsted, Gatton, Brasted and Cliffe-at-Hoo churches were handled by the same architect about 1200, and he points out that four of these churches—Merton, Merstham, and the two in Kent—have the blind arcading, rising from the floor to the wall plate in the chancel, with similar windows. Here still remain

three of the narrow lancet windows, well splayed (two others having been blocked by monuments, behind which is the vestry), and the remaining windows have double lights, with simple tracery. In the south-east window is some interesting coloured glass. The trefoil contains a finely drawn head of the Saviour, silver and gold being the prevailing colours, said to be of the 14th century, as the head and nimbus are in one piece. Underneath are the Royal Arms of Edward III., three lions and three fleur-de-lis in alternate sections, partly restored, and the arms of Merton Abbey, *or*, with fretwork *azure*, and eagles displayed at intersections, *argent*. These are supposed to have been the arms of Gilbert, the founder. There are also a few remains of ancient glass preserved in the vestry. Another beautiful feature of the chancel is the roof. It combines strength and massiveness with lightness and delicacy. It is planned as if intended to span a much wider space. Such coved sides are generally used to contract and clothe an extensive expanse, while the massive tie-beams suggest solidity and carrying power. Notice how the latter are lightened in effect by the grooved moulding underneath, and the battlement moulding at the top. The octagonal King-posts, springing from the ties, with the mullions and tracery on each

side, are delightfully delicate. The centre barrel was at one time panelled, like the sides, but this has been removed, leaving the rafters visible. Its date is about 1400, and the wood used is chestnut, not beloved of spiders. The nave roof may be earlier. Here the massive beams on the wall plate, and across the nave, are of oak, much rougher in appearance, and without the embattled moulding.

In the Records of Merton Priory there is this entry: 'William de Coignes was ordered to deliver to the Prior the gift of the King (Henry III.) six oaks in the Forest of Windsor, where they could conveniently be taken with least harm to the forest; for the works of their Church. By the King at Kingston, July 31, 1225.\* These oaks may have been intended for the conventual, not the Parish Church, but a further entry, of the same date, also records another royal gift of six oaks, at the Prior's petition 'for the works at his house.' It is possible, therefore, that the present beams may have been royal oaks from Windsor.† Above the plastered ceiling the oak timbers remain, and these might, with advantage, be uncovered, and some dormer

\* Page 85.

† It is worth noting that gifts of this kind were reciprocal. In 1343 (Edward III.) the Priory contributed twelve oaks from its woods at Kingswood, for the King's chapel at Westminster.

windows inserted to let more light into the centre of the church, where it is needed. Before the south aisle was thrown out there were three double-light windows, two lancets, like those in the chancel, and two smaller openings, one of which remains in the south wall of the belfry. In the old prints a dormer window is depicted at the south-east end of the nave. The original north wall seems to have had two large lancet windows and two smaller ones east of the porch, with the small circular-headed window still *in situ* in the belfry; the dormer on this side being over the porch. Thus the church must then have been well lighted, without clerestory windows.

In 1703 William Baynes obtained permission from the Vestry 'to erect and set up a pew at the west end, at his own charge' (probably the old gallery), and 'to make a vault under the said pew, for himself and his family.'

In 1856 a movement was set on foot to consider the enlargement of the church, because of the increasing population. This project met with some opposition, for while acknowledging the need, it was thought to be 'unwise and riskful to attempt to enlarge the present church.' The subject was much debated, and many suggestions made.

One plan seems to have contemplated the alteration and removal of the present nave roof, as the plain stone corbels inserted in the present south nave wall show. Eventually, a less ambitious scheme was adopted, by which 'no injury would be done to the structure of the church, neither would it endanger the stability thereof, nor deteriorate the character of the architecture.' The first and last of these three statements are open to question. Mr. Digweed was the architect, and the cost was not to exceed £550. The sum actually spent amounted to £723, including the warming and lighting of the church, and varnishing and repairing the hatchments. Half the money was subscribed, and the rest borrowed from Richard Thornton, to be repaid in seven instalments of £50. Thus the south lean-to aisle was built, and additional accommodation provided for eighty or ninety parishioners, when the Rev. William Edelman was Vicar. As soon as the debt was cleared off, a further enlargement was deemed necessary, and the Rev. J. F. Fixsen, then Vicar, announced at a Vestry, June 16, 1864, that Miss Mary Hawkins had bequeathed £500 for this object. This led to the building of the north aisle, on similar lines, but loftier and wider than the south, at the cost of over £1,000, Mr. Ferry being architect.

In the Diamond Jubilee year (1897) the old gallery was removed, the west arch rebuilt, and carried higher, the roof panelled, the three bells rehung, and two more added; the old west window, dating back to the 12th century, re-opened and enlarged, and filled with coloured glass, the architect being the late Mr. Quartermain, of Merton.

At the dissolution of the Abbey, in 1538, the church, with its endowments, devolved on the Crown. In 1552-3, Edward VI., by letters patent, dated March 14, 'in consideration of the sum of £359 granted unto Thomas Lock and Mary his wife, and to their heirs and assigns for ever, the Rectory of the church of Merton, with the appertinencies, late parcel of the possession of the dissolved Priory of Merton, to be holden of the King, his heirs and successors.'\*

The Locks thus became Lay Rectors, and had the right to nominate a perpetual Curate to serve the Parish Church, to whom the lesser tithes were given. In the earliest Register there is this record: 'Michael Wigmore was first Curate of Merton, under Thos. Locke, Esq.' The Locks lived at the old house on the north side of the church, which they had purchased in 1499, and it is

\* Manning and Bray, Vol. I., page 263.

thought that they held the Church lands under the Prior, before they bought them from the King. The family were possessed of the advowson and estate until 1643, when John Lock and Jane his wife first mortgaged and in 1646 conveyed, the equity of redemption of the Rectory, with all the houses thereto belonging, to Catherine Highlord, the widow of John Highlord, Alderman of London. On her death, not long after, the estate descended to Robert Wilson, her eldest son by her first husband, Rowland Wilson, of Merton. From this Robert, who died 1660, it descended to his eldest son, also called Robert, who had an estate at Didlington, Norfolk. Robert of Didlington, who was a bachelor (died 1701), conveyed in 1697, 'Rectory, Church tithes, and all other less estate at Merton unto Robert Dorril, of London (whose son, John, also became Lord of the Manor), subject to 13/4 per annum, payable out of the Rectory to the Lord of the Manor of Greenwich, £14 per annum to the Bishop of Winchester (probably as stipend to curate; this is still the amount of the lesser tithes paid by the Lay Rector), and 10½d. to the Archdeacon for the Procurations and Synodals.' From Robert Dorril it came to his daughter, Mary, who married Henry

Meriton. They had no children and, after his wife's death, Henry Meriton conveyed the estate to Joseph Chitty, in 1733. His assignees sold it to his brother, Sir Thomas Chitty, Knight and Alderman (Lord Mayor of London, 1759). Sir Thomas left it by will to his daughter, Eleanor, the wife of George Bond, and their heirs. The estate is described in Sir Thomas Chitty's will as consisting of a Royalty, the Church tithes, the mansion, called Merton Place, and his large farms, named Merton Holts and West Barnes. Their son, Rev. Chas. Frederick Bond, was Vicar of Merton, from 1789-1800, and a grandson, Rev. Essex Henry Bond, from 1827-1848. The latter, shortly before his death, sold the advowson separately to his friend, Rev. Wm. Edelman, a curate and schoolmaster of Wimbledon, who became Vicar in 1848. Mrs. Edelman left the right of presentation to Rev. G. W. Robinson, Vicar of Walmley, in whose family it still remains.

INCUMBENTS OF MERTON.

Michael Wigmore	1559-1614
* ?	1614-1622
John Harrison	1623-1639
John Strickley	1639-1656-8

\*A change of handwriting occurs in the Registers, but no Incumbent's name has been found.

*Edward Raynford	1658-
Charles Lovell	1694-1700
Daniel Sturmy	1700-1712
Edward Collins	1712-1737
William Halford	1737-1740
John Blakisten	1740-1776
Richard Webster	1776-1783
John Capel Townsend	1783-1789
Charles Frederick Bond	1789-1800
James Olive	1800-1801
Thomas Lancaster	1801-1827
Essex Henry Bond	1827-1848
William Edelman	1848-1863
John Frederick Fixsen	1863-1869
John Caillard Erck	1869-1887
Edward Alfred Kempson	1887-1899
Ernest Murray Robinson	1900-1904
James Edwin Jagger	1904

Besides the Manor of Merton, which Gilbert gave to the Abbey, he also endowed it with the tithes and the revenues of the Parochial Church, and that under *plenary* appropriation, *i.e.*, the assignment of the

\*The Registers were very carelessly and imperfectly kept during the Commonwealth. In 1658 the Commissioners' report is—

'Seventhly they further say & certify y<sup>e</sup> Rectorie of *Merton* is worth aboute fifty poundes p ann in y<sup>e</sup> guift of Mr. Robert Wilson Impropiator who hath placed there Mr. Edward Raynford y<sup>e</sup> present Minister who officiateth there for w<sup>ch</sup> y<sup>e</sup> said Mr. Wilson giveth him his Sallary twenty pounds p ann & his Diett y<sup>e</sup> prsh Church is aboute a mile distant from Wimbledon y<sup>e</sup> next Church & aboute a mile distant from y<sup>e</sup> Church of Tooting Graveney whether there be cause either to unite or divide the same they humbly submit.' S.A.C. vol 17, page 94.

Benefice, *pleno jure*, without any other reserve than that the Abbey should serve the Cure by one of their own body, or by some secular clerk, of temporary appointment; who, as to the cure of souls, was responsible to the Bishop; but, as to the revenues, was accountable to the Prior. This may not have led to great neglect and trouble at Merton, as in other parishes, for the clerk, who served the Parish Church, would reside usually in the parish at the Abbey. Hence it is that there is no formal record of the presentation of any clerk to serve Merton Church, so long as it remained connected with the Abbey. Yet there is the following evidence to show that the church was well equipped with all the accessories that belonged to the due administration of the religious worship and rites of the time, and the list bears witness to the fact that the services at the Parish Church had been duly rendered.

INVENTORY OF CHURCH GOODS, I. EDWARD VI. 1547,  
MORTEN.

'This inventori taken by the jurie aforesaid the xiiijth of December in the year above written of all and everye soche church goodes as dothe or ought to apperteine unto the parishe aforesaid in the charge of the churchwardens herafter apperethe.

Imprimis a chalice of silver.

Item ij corporous cases.



## MERTON CHURCH

Item iij vestmentes.

- „ one aulter cloth of silk and ij others old and . . .
- „ iij candlestickes of latten and a crismatorie.
- „ ij short towells of diaper.
- „ a holy water stock of latten.
- „ a playne towell
- „ a service boke a psalter a bible.
- „ ij cussions of bandkin.
- „ vj stremors.
- „ a canapie of dornix.
- „ a hersclothe of cotton.
- „ iij albes.
- „ iiij chestes.
- „ in the steple iij belles.

Md. Thes wer churchwardens in the first year of the Kinges Majesties reigne that now be—  
John Hillar, John Challinner.

Md. Ther was stolen out of the said church by night ij corporas iij clothes a crosse copper gilt a pix and a canapie iij old vestmentes iij copes one aulter clothe ij curtains iij ould aulter clothes iij aulter clothes of silk one pulpit clothe ix old clothes a sencer of latten and ij herst clothes of cotton but by whom we know not.

William Tyrrell, John Chaundler, sidesmen.

William Trusse, John Goldsmith, wardens charged with the goodes.

Another inventory of the church goods was taken in 1553, when the list is much the same, though some of the articles are differently described, and it is especially noted that nothing had been sold by the churchwardens in the intervening years.

Then in 1554 we have the following entry :

'Wardens—William Trusse, John Goldsmith.

Delivered unto wardens ther the xix day of May anno regni regis Edward vjth viio by Sir Thomas Carwarden and Sir Thomas Saunder knightes John Scott Nicholas Leigh and William Saunder esquiors Commissioners of our sovereign lord the king among other to that effect these percell of churche goodes hereafter ensuing :

A challice of sylver poiz x oz.

ij alter clothes a herce cloth and cushion for comunyon table also remaining in there charge to the kynges use thre belles.

SALES.

Brasse and latten xiiijlb. ijs. iiijd.

The residue for Merten ornaments sold vijs. vjd.

Summa ix<sup>s</sup>. xd.'

Of this spoliation nothing remains but the one pre-Reformation bell.

Against the south wall of the chancel is erected a finely proportioned alabaster monument to the memory of Gregory Lovell. It is divided into two compartments: on the dexter side is a man kneeling, and under him, a son and three daughters by his first wife; on the sinister the two wives; with the five sons, by the second marriage, placed below. There is the following inscription:—

'Here lieth Gregory Lovell of Merton Abbey Esquyer Cofferer of Her Majesties Household second son of Sr. Frances Lovell of Harlinge in Norffc. He had two wyves Ioane, daughter of . . .



MERTON CHURCH, THE LOVELL MONUMENT.

*From a Photograph.*

Whithead by whome he had issue Thomas Mildred Elizabethe and Frances and Dorothy daughter of Michaell Greene by whom he had issue Sr Robert Lovell Henry Thomas William and Gregory He lived to the age of threescore and xv and dyed the xv of Marche in the yeare of our Lorde 1597.'

The arms above are quarterly: 1. *Argent*, a chevron *azure* between three squirrels, sejant, *guile*. 2. *Sable*, a cross between four lions rampant, *or*. 3. *Vert*, two chevronells *or*. 4. Barry of ten, *or* and *sable* surcharged with a lion rampant *or*.

The monument is in an excellent state of preservation, having been cleaned and admirably restored, at the expense of Mr. Churchwarden Witley, in 1889.

Queen Elizabeth, by letters patent, in 1586-7 granted a lease of the Abbey to Gregory Lovell under this description:

'All that House and scite of the late Priory of Merton (alias Marten, alias Marton), in the County of Surrey, then dissolved; and all houses, edifices, barns, stables, dovecotes, garden-grounds, orchards, gardens, mills, land and soil, within the scite and precinct of the said late dissolved Priory; and several parcels of land therein particularly specified, with their appertinencies, situate, lying, and being in Marten (alias Marton, alias Merton), Moredun, Micheam, alias Michelham, Stretham, and Long Ditton, in the said County of Surrey, and to the said Priory of Marten (alias Marton, alias Merton), late

belonging, and in the proper hands, culture and occupation of the late Prior and Convent of the said late Priory, to the use of their House at the time of the dissolution thereof (excepting all great trees, woods, underwoods, woods, mines, and quarries of all and singular the premises) unto Gregory Lovell, Esq., Cofferer of her household; to hold to the said Gregory for twenty-one years from Michaelmas then last past.'

Again, by other letters patent, Feb. 17, 1589-90, the Queen did demise to the said Gregory all the premises as above described; 'to hold to him, his heirs and assigns, for the further term of twenty-one years, from the determination of the former grant, under the yearly rent of £26 . 13 . 4.' The Lovells did not retain possession even for the first term, for three years after Gregory Lovell's death we find the Queen, by letters patent, May 15, 1600, granting the premises to Charles, Earl of Nottingham and High Admiral of England, 'in consideration of his laudable services.'

The Registers show that the Lovells had resided at Merton many years before the Queen leased them the Abbey. These are the entries relating to the family:—

1560, Feb. 25, Thomas, son of Mr. Gregory Lovell, baptized.

1564, Aug. 19, Thomas Lovell buried.

1570, April 2, Mistress Jone Lovell, wyfe to Mr. Gregorie Lovell, buried.

- 1570, May 22, Mr. Poynings Heron was married unto Mistress Elizabeth Lovell.
- 1572, Sept. 2, William Heron, sonne of Mr. Poynings Heron, baptized.
- 1572, Jan. 4, Mr. Gregorie Lovell married unto Mistress Dorothy Greene.
- 1573, Jan. 7, Robert Lovell, sonne to Mr. Gregory Lovell, baptized.
- 1575, Feb. 15, Henry Lovell, sonne to Mr. Gregory Lovell, baptized.
- 1576, Jan. 2, Mrs. Francys Lovell, buried.
- 1577, Jan. 24, Thomas Lovell, sonne to Mr Gregory Lovell, baptized.
- 1579, Aug. 9, William Lovell, sonne to Mr. Gregory Lovell, Esquyer, baptized.
- 1580, Aug. 24, Gregorie, sonne of Gregorie Lovell, Esquire, baptized.
- 1595, July 14, Mr. Robert Lovell married unto Mrs. Jane Roper.
- 1595, Aug. 4, Mr. Henry Lovell married to Mrs. Ann Milner, widow.
- 1596, July 19, Mary Lovell, daughter of Mr. Henry Lovell, baptized.
- 1597, April 12, Gregorie Lovell, Esquire, buried.

Here the Lovell records cease, and the Abbey evidently passed out of their hands in 1600, as stated above. A Rev. Charles Lovell was incumbent, 1694-1700, but whether he belonged to this family or not, is uncertain.

The Hatchments in the Church have been dealt with in a previous article,\* and it now only remains to refer to a painting of 'Christ bearing the Cross.'

\* See "The Hatchments in Merton Church" by Walter E. Ledger, A.R.I.B.A., W. & M.A., Vol. II., 1905.

This large picture, now hanging under the belfry, was noticed by Lysons when he visited the church in 1792. In his 'Environs of London' he writes, 'against the north wall of the church hangs a large picture of Christ bearing the Cross; it is much damaged, but appears to have been a good picture, and was either the work of Luca Jordano, or a copy from him. It is not known when, or by whom, it was given to the Church.† At that time it had, probably, been in the Church some 70 or 80 years. In 'Surrey Archæological Collections' (V. xv., p. 16) it is stated that "many churches, as at Farnham and Merton, were, in the 18th century, provided with 'altar pieces' in oils."

Luca Jordano, to whom Lysons attributes the painting, was born at Naples in 1632, and died 1705. He was noted for his rich flesh colours, and copied 'the great masters so well that even connoisseurs were imposed on.' Hence, Lysons had some grounds for his suggestive guess. While visiting Antwerp a couple of years ago, I came across the original picture, which is a painting by Van Dyck, hanging with fourteen others on the north wall of the Church of St. Paul. It is marked in the guide books as one to be noted, and said to be an early Van Dyck, 'in many parts like

† Vol. I., page 347.

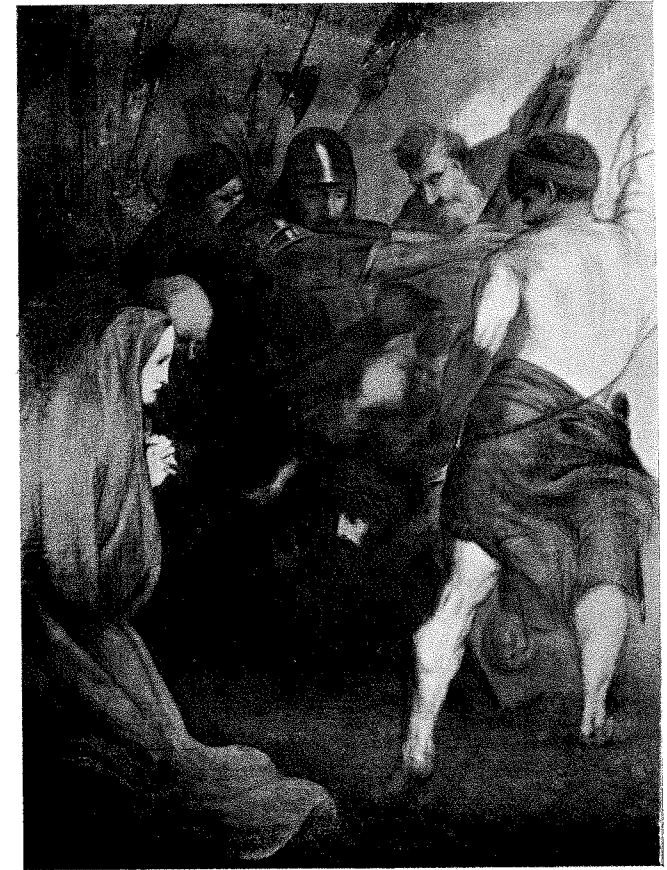
the work of Rubens, particularly the figure with his back towards the spectator, which is well drawn.' Van Dyck was born at Antwerp in 1599, became a pupil of Rubens in 1615, and studied in Italy 1623-1626. On his return to his native town he was commissioned to paint 'a vision of St. Augustine,' as an altar piece for this St. Paul's Church, 'the execution of which established his reputation as one of the first painters of his time.' During the next few years, while residing at Antwerp, he produced most of his fine historical and devotional works, among the latter being 'Christ bearing the Cross.' In 1632 he came to England at the invitation of Charles I., who appointed him Court painter and knighted him. He was at this time in such request as a portrait-painter, that he rarely found leisure for historical works, in which it was his ambition to excel. He died in London, in 1641, at the early age of 42 years.

The Merton picture was cleaned by the same firm, to whom the works of Van Dyck at Hampton Court had been entrusted, and like the famous portrait of Charles I. there, it was found to bear no distinguishing mark or initials. It was, therefore, submitted to Martin Colnaghi, the renowned connoisseur, who described it as 'a glorious piece of

colouring, which certainly belongs to the Rubens and Van Dyck School.' Mr. Colnaghi thought he detected certain slight imperfections and defects which made it plain to him that it was not Van Dyck's own painting, yet the figure of the Virgin so pleased him that he declared it worthy of the great master himself. His official certificate runs, 'the picture of our Saviour bearing the Cross is a copy of a well-known work by Van Dyck at Antwerp, and is painted by a pupil of the Rubens School.' Much as we should desire to connect Van Dyck with the present picture, even if he only finished what a favourite pupil had copied, yet the fact probably is, that when Van Dyck died in London, some person who greatly valued his work, had this copy made at the time (about 1642-5) by one of Van Dyck's most gifted followers. It ought to be added that an artist of fame, who has examined the painting, disagreed with Mr. Colnaghi, and was inclined to think more highly of it. The Picture is well worth close and concentrated study. There are seven figures, which stand out prominently, besides three soldiers in the upper left hand corner, as you face the painting, which are only seen on close inspection. Our Lord's Figure is in the centre. He has fallen on His Knees and Hands under

the Cross, the beam of which runs over His Back, and the cross-beam behind His Face. His Body, clothed in a dark robe, with a brown girdle round the waist, extends towards the figure of the Virgin, His Head, turned slightly over the right shoulder, is crowned with thorns. There is no halo, save that which the blood, drawn from the forehead by the thorns, so appropriately and suggestively makes. There is a patch of blood also on the right shoulder; but it is His Face which rivets attention and imprints itself on the mind. There the deepest marks of suffering are traceable, in those dark rims round the eyes, and that deathly pallor of the lips, while the pathetic, patient, enduring, quiet, pleading look of the eyes is what grows upon us, and fastens itself in the memory. It may be reverently contemplated again and again, and ever with deeper meaning and fuller insight into its loving attractiveness.

The figure of the Virgin is the most distinct and clear of all, and none but a master's mind and hand could conceive and execute so perfect a presentation. I do not know where its equal can be found, even in Van Dyck's work, for he did not leave many examples of devotional studies, yet here the religious grief, delineated by posture and



MERTON CHURCH. PICTURE—CHRIST BEARING THE CROSS.

*From a Photograph.*

expression, surpasses words, it is felt. Robed in her traditional blue dress, which falls in artistic naturalness, she *kneels*, unconsciously, instinctively. It is the face again that centres the interest. The yearning, living grief, depicted in that sweet, womanly countenance is so real and inexpressively pathetic; the tears, as they course down the blanched cheeks, and the parted lips, trembling with heart-breaking sorrow, all stand out with such vividness and reality as genius alone can portray. Then, notice too, the white clasped hands and how nervously the fingers are pressing each other in the clasp of earnestness and anxious fear.

The old man behind the Virgin, in a red robe, whose eyes are closed, and whose face betrays his struggling emotion, represents 'Simon the Cyrenian, on whom they laid the Cross, that he might bear it after Jesus.' Already his hand is under the long beam, to raise it. The Roman soldier in the helmet is the centurion, in charge of the crucifixion. His face is kind and thoughtful, and he is evidently giving orders for the Cross to be lifted up. The bearded man near to him, with the knotted staff in his hand, is difficult to interpret. The other three figures represent crucifiers. The massive, well-drawn figure on

the right is lifting the end of the Cross with a rope; the sharp-featured man, bending down, has his hand on our Lord's shoulder; while the third man's face, behind the centurion, is hard and brutish. The whole picture is distinguished by its fine colouring and drawing, and faithfully follows the Van Dyck at Antwerp.

J. E. JAGGER.

Mr. Frederic Shields, Morayfield, Merton, the distinguished painter of the Chapel of the Ascension, Marble Arch, says that 'certain portions of this Picture bear unmistakeable marks of Van Dyck's hand.'

## SOME NOTES ON THE CHURCH BELLS OF WIMBLEDON AND MERTON

**W**AS a county, Surrey is not rich in its possession of ancient Church bells. Its neighbours, Kent and Sussex, are far wealthier in the number of those recorded which date from mediæval times. This being so, it is somewhat remarkable that the belfries of Wimbledon and Merton should contain two of the old bells, out of a total of twenty-two for the county recorded by Stahlschmidt as still existing.\*

My attention was first called to the subject in 1896, when the Rev. Edward A. Downman, author of 'Ancient Church Bells in England,' 1898,—to whose book I am indebted for some of the following notes—asked me to visit Wimbledon belfry, for the purpose of examining an old bell there. This visit I made in January, 1897. Again, in November, 1907, I visited the belfry, and this time I

\* Stahlschmidt: Surrey Bells and London Bellfounders (London, 1884).