XX. *Observations on an Inscription in the Church of Sunning-Hill, Berks. By Dr. Milles, Dean of Exeter, and President of the Society.*

Read at the SOCIETY of ANTIQUARIES, Feb. 25, 1768.

THE parish church of Sunning-Hill in Berkshire, is a specimen, both in its form and size, of the earlier parochial churches which were built in this kingdom, consisting only of a nave, and a small chancel, divided by a square belfry tower.

ON the impost moulding of one of the arches of this tower, is carved the following inscription :

XI·KL: ÆRTCH: OB: LIVING: PRESBI

which I read thus, *Undecimo Kalendarum Martii obiit Livingus Presbiter.*

THE name of the priest, the style of the inscription, the form and abbreviation of the letters, and the place where it is cut, seem to indicate great antiquity.

IT is well known to those who are conversant with our antient records, that Livingus occurs frequently in them as a Saxon proper name. The last bishop of Devonshire, before the removal of the episcopal see from Crediton to Exeter, was called by this name. He held the see of Worcester at the same time, and died in the reign of Edward the Confessor [a].

[a] See Godwin de Praefulibus, p. 399, ed. Richardson.

THESE Saxon names growing into disuse after the conquest and being succeeded by those of the Normans, make it probable, that this priest lived not long after that period.

THE style and situation of the inscription shew it to have been rather commemorative than sepulchral. It is not impossible that the body of Livingus might have been interred under the belfry, at that time perhaps the entrance to the church, which might originally have consisted only of the chancel and tower; parochial churches being at that early period very small, and the dead being more generally buried in the porch, or before the entrance, than within the church.

THIS inscription, however, which points out the day of Livingus's death, without taking notice of the year, seems rather intended as a memorial to his successors and parishioners of the day on which his death was to be celebrated, or a mass to be said for his soul, either on account of his sanctity, or for some legacy, benefaction, or sum of money given for that purpose. It is indeed precisely the stile in which all the entries are made in the Roman calendars for the celebration of the deaths of their saints, founders, and benefactors.

THE simplicity and conciseness of the inscription is another proof of its antiquity, and so is the use of the Roman numerals, and the form of the letters, which are Roman capitals, except the *M* in Martii, and the *L* in Presbiter, which are Saxon letters.

I MUST observe likewise that the inscription is perfect, and fills almost two sides of the impost moulding. It appears also to have been cut subsequent to the building of the tower; the distances between the words being unequal, on account of some cavities and imperfections in the stone, which rendered it unfit for the inscription.