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OF THE

Cambridge Antiquarian Society,

OCTOBER 28, 1889, TO MAY 19, 1890.

WITH

Communications

MADE TO THE SOCIETY.

No. XXXII.

BEING No. 2 OF THE SEVENTH VOLUME.

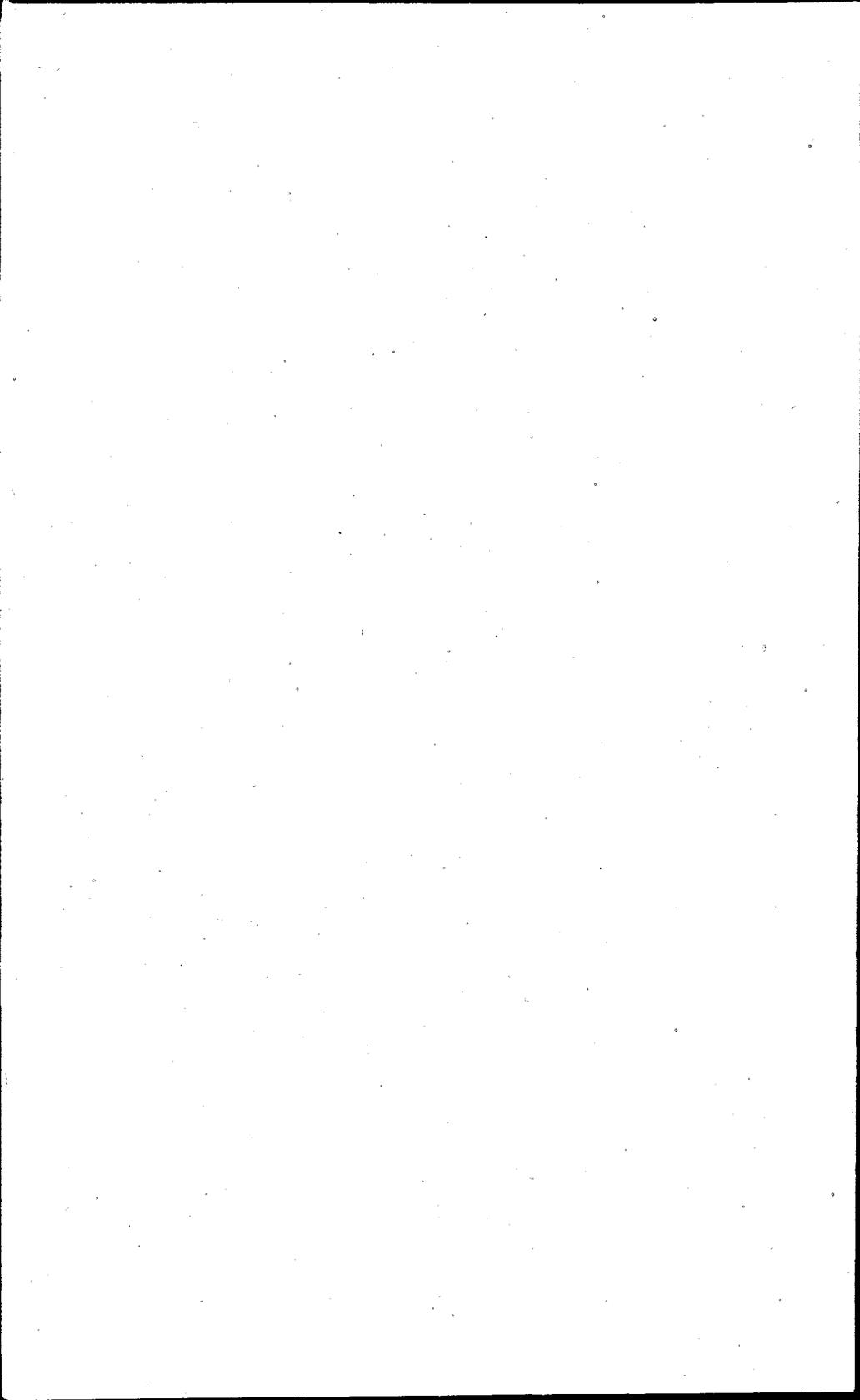
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The Rev. E. G. WOOD, B.D., made the following communication :

ON THE FORMATION OF THE ANCIENT DIOCESE OF ELY.

It is usually said that the ancient diocese of Ely, as existing until the present century, and comprising Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely, was formed out of the diocese of Lincoln in the reign of Henry I. and during the episcopate of Remigius, the first Bishop of Lincoln. It would however seem, from a careful examination of facts and documents, that this statement was not an accurate one. No doubt the chroniclers from Eadmer onwards made that statement. The question is, Are they right? Do the charters and the facts of the case support them? If not, then, the chroniclers notwithstanding, we must come to some other conclusion. Reference to the charter granted to the Monastery of Ely by Edward the Confessor shews that no bishop could exercise any spiritual jurisdiction over or on any of the possessions of the Monastery, either within or without the Isle. Unquestionably the whole Isle was exempt. Other considerations would reduce the possible northern limit of the jurisdiction of the bishops of Dorchester, the predecessors in title of the bishops of Lincoln, to the Devil's Dyke, and even with great probability to the Fleam Dyke. Certainly Lincoln (*Dorchester*) had no lands north of the latter as shown by Domesday; while even south of Fleam Dyke Ely possessed lands and manors. A probable estimate would be that while over 350,000 acres the bishops of Dorchester exercised no jurisdiction, they possibly did do so within the remaining 166,000, out of the total 416,000 which formed the area of the Diocese of Ely when first constituted, though not exclusively by any means. Hence the possible extent of territorial jurisdiction exercised by Dorchester was very small compared with that of the exempt jurisdiction. That Remigius, the first Norman

bishop, under whom the see was removed from Dorchester to Lincoln, did endeavour to exercise jurisdiction, not only without but within the Isle, is of course quite certain. But it is submitted that this was a usurpation. Certainly, as the *Liber Eliensis* discloses, abbot Simeon's submission to the claim of Remigius to have the right of consecrating him excited great indignation at Ely. His successor, abbot Richard, successfully resisted the encroachment, and was so far from recognizing Lincoln that he selected Herbert of Losinga (bishop of Norwich) to perform the solemn dedication of the new shrine of S. Etheldreda. There can be no doubt that the idea of making Ely the see of a new diocesan bishop originated with abbot Richard. He obtained the King's (Henry I.) consent, and messengers were in fact on their way to Rome to obtain the Pope's Bull of confirmation, when Richard died and the proceedings were suspended. Hervey, bishop of Bangor, having fled from his see owing to the turbulence of the Welsh, was appointed by the king to take charge of the Monastery. The next steps are recorded in a series of documents, whose genuineness has on several grounds been assailed both by Selden and by Wharton, but defended by Bentham in his *History of Ely*. These documents are (1) a letter from S. Anselm to Pope Paschal II. reciting that the diocese of Lincoln being too extensive for one bishop to efficiently perform his duty, it was desirable to found a new bishopric whose see should be Ely—no mention being made of the territory to be assigned to it. He suggests that compensation should be made to Lincoln *pro iis quæ assumuntur de...ecclesia [Lincolniensi] ad instaurandum novum Episcopatum*. And he says Robert Bloet the bishop of Lincoln was quite willing to come into the arrangement. (2) Reply of the Pope assenting, and reciting S. Anselm's words as to the size of Lincoln and commending Hervey to him as a fit and proper person to be first bishop of the new see. (3) The Bull establishing the see, and leaving the delimitation of territory to

the King, the archbishop, and the bishop of Lincoln. (4) The charter of Henry I. dated at Nottingham on S. Etheldreda's day 1108, founding the see and describing the extent of territory, and determining that the manor of Spaldwick in Huntingdonshire with its appendants Somersham and Bluntisham, heretofore belonging to Ely, was to be assigned to Lincoln by way of compensation "*pro subjectione et omnibus Episcopabilibus consuetudinibus ad supradictam Lincolnensem ecclesiam pertinentibus;*" and stating that this was done by the advice and consent of Pope Paschal. Now with regard to these documents it must be observed, first, that the statement of S. Anselm was (though undoubtedly made in good faith) misleading; it was probably suggested to him by the promoters of the scheme in order to save the *amour-propre* of Lincoln: next, that it is inconsistent with the statements of the chroniclers that Robert Bloet was violently opposed to the scheme, and there is no particular reason for doubting them as to that point. Then that if the real motive had been that stated, the obvious remedy was to erect some of the far-distant parts, e.g. Oxon. and Berks. and Bucks., into a new see, rather than the comparatively near territory indicated, the detaching (if it were really a detaching) of which could not have appreciably relieved Lincoln; lastly that S. Anselm being a foreigner would be exceedingly unlikely to be acquainted with the peculiar position, surroundings, circumstances, and privileges of Ely. With regard to the Charter it would certainly seem that the averment as to Spaldwick is open to question. For (1) no such advice is contained in the Bull, (2) the terms used are very different from those used by S. Anselm—the latter suggest merely an exchange of lands and revenues, the former compensation for loss of spiritual jurisdiction, and so savour unpleasantly of simony. It would seem only reasonable to infer that inasmuch as the hidage of Spaldwick with Somersham and Bluntisham was almost exactly equal to the hidage of the lands in Cambridgeshire belonging to

the see of Lincoln, as shewn by Domesday, the exchange was simply temporal, and proves nothing with regard to jurisdiction. This is confirmed by the fact that the Hundred Rolls shew that in the time of Edward I. the see of Lincoln had no lands in Cambridgeshire. Peter de Blois and Giraldus are neither of them trustworthy; still their opinion of the origin of the see was that it was due to political causes, the king feeling that he could deal more influentially with a bishop at Ely than with an abbot. Take that opinion for what it is worth, it is inconsistent with the statement of the documents. The more accurate way of stating the origin of the see would seem to be that it was formed by the conversion of the abbatial jurisdiction of Ely into that of a bishop, having his see at Ely; and that to the territory over which the Abbots had heretofore exercised such jurisdiction there were added portions of the county of Cambridge, over which certain bishops, including the bishop of Lincoln, and possibly before the transfer the old bishop of Dorchester, and in S. E. Cambridgeshire the bishop of London, had wielded episcopal authority.

The Rev. E. VENABLES, M.A. Precentor of Lincoln, made the following communication on the same subject.

That the diocese of Ely on its first constitution by Henry the First was taken out of the diocese of Lincoln with some additions from the diocese of Norwich, is an historical fact resting on indisputable evidence. The contemporaneous testimony of Eadmer the intimate friend of Anselm, to whom as Primate the establishment of the new diocese appears to have been chiefly due, is precise on this point, and it is confirmed by so many later authorities of weight, that, if we reject it or even regard it as doubtful, all historical evidence must be thrown aside as worthless. Eadmer's¹ words are clear: "In those days (A.D. 1109) there was a good deal of discussion about the

¹ The passage is quoted at length in the Appendix to this paper.

diocese of the Bishop of Lincoln, which was too extensive; and, inasmuch as Christian reason indicated the advisability of such a course, the King with the Archbishop and other chief men of the kingdom resolved that some territory should be taken from that diocese with which to form another bishoprick, the Cathedral see of which should be in the abbey of Ely." He goes on to say that Anselm, who was the chief mover in the matter, knowing that no new Bishoprick could be anywhere established without the Pope's consent, wrote to His Holiness on the subject. Nothing can be more definite than the words of his letter. He tells the Pope that "there is a certain Bishoprick in England, viz. that of Lincoln, the diocese of which is too extensive for one bishop to supply all those spiritual functions which can be performed by no one but a bishop—*quae non nisi ab Episcopali persona fieri queunt*—this having been taken into consideration by the king and the bishops and other magnates of the realm, they deemed that it would be for the good of the church if that diocese were divided into two, and an Episcopal see formed in a certain abbey situate in the isle called Ely, which is within the said diocese—*intra præfatam Diocesim*." He goes on to tell the Pope that "Robert [Bloet] then bishop of Lincoln had readily given his consent to this partition of his diocese, a sufficient equivalent having been made to indemnify him for the loss of what was taken from his own church to establish the new see."

Having this contemporaneous evidence from one who had the fullest opportunity of knowing the exact character of the transaction, which is fully confirmed by the letters of the Pope Paschal II., regarding the constitution of the see, and the terms of Henry's charter of foundation, it is impossible, I think, to call in question that the diocese of Ely was almost entirely taken out of the diocese of Lincoln, and that on the ground of its immense area, then extending over ten counties, being too extensive for any one bishop to administer adequately. Eadmer

also shews us that the division was the work of the king and his nobles at the suggestion of Anselm, and that the bishop of Lincoln was compensated (whether sufficiently or not, does not touch the main question) for the loss of the temporal profits of his jurisdiction over the surrendered portion.

What the portion surrendered was is clearly stated by other authorities. The Waverley Annalist, or rather Robert de Monte, whom he is copying, when recording the appointment of Hervey, by Henry I., as the first bishop of Ely, says that "one county viz. Cambridgeshire, withdrawn from the bishop of Lincoln, *subtractus Lincolnensi episcopo*," was placed under this new bishop; adding, which removes all doubt as to the term implying what we mean by a county, "there remained to the bishop of Lincoln eight counties or provinces, those of Lincoln, Leicester, Northampton, Hertford, Bedford, Buckingham, Oxford, Huntingdon¹," to which we may add a ninth, omitted by the chronicler, the little shire of mysterious origin, that of Rutland. Matthew Paris also in the same way identifies the portion of which the diocese of Lincoln was deprived to constitute the new diocese of Ely with the county of Cambridge. He writes: "On the death of Robert, who was the last abbot in the Isle, the county of Cambridge, being withdrawn from the bishop of Lincoln, was subjected by diocesan law to this new prelate²."

I may also quote Giraldus Cambrensis, as confirming the fact of the original connection of Ely and Lincoln having been brought to an end by the strong will of Henry I., not without a hint of force being put upon a not altogether willing bishop, who had to be compensated for consenting to what he could not prevent. He writes: "In the time of Robert Bloet the church of Ely, through the will and the *violence* of the king, ceased to be a daughter of Lincoln, and that which was once a subordinate was made a chief church of cathedral rank. The

¹ *Annal. Monast.* ii. 215.

² *Matth. Par. Hist. Angl.* i. 210. *Chron. Maj.* ii. 136.

Bishop of Lincoln, however, received in exchange from the monastery of Ely a manor worth forty pounds, viz. Spaldwick with its appurtenances."

The history of Thorney Abbey supplies a subsidiary illustration of the episcopal authority exercised by the see of Lincoln over Cambridgeshire. Thorney, though within a mile or two of the borders of the counties of Northampton and Lincoln, is actually in the county of Cambridge. Before the erection of Ely into a separate see, the monastery had been subject to the bishop of Lincoln. On the constitution of the new diocese this relation ceased, and we find Henry I. writing to Hervey, the first bishop of Ely, in the following terms: "I forbid you to exact any other dues of Robert, Abbot of Thorney, and of his abbey than his predecessors were accustomed to pay to the Bishop of Lincoln...and I forbid the Abbot Robert to act otherwise to you than did his predecessor Gunther" (who it must be borne in mind was consecrated in the Cathedral of *Lincoln* on S. Peter's Day, 1082) "to Robert, Bishop of Lincoln."

It is clear from these authorities that the diocese of Lincoln contributed the large part of the new diocese, by the surrender of the county of Cambridge. The diocese of Norwich, however, was also put under contribution. This we learn, among other authorities, from the Chronicle of Abbot John of Peterborough (Sparke, p. 62). He tells us that in 1109, "on the conversion of the abbey of Ely into a bishoprick, the King made Hervey, Bishop of Bangor, the first bishop, a diocese being assigned to him, taken partly out of that of Norwich, but chiefly—*maxime*—from that of Lincoln, because that diocese seemed sufficiently large; and in order that the bishop of Lincoln might not have cause to complain that he had been unjustly mutilated, the king satisfied him with demesne lands belonging to Ely." I do not know whether the exact limits of this Norwich contingent can be laid down. To do this not by mere guess-work

but by actual documentary evidence would be one very desirable result of this discussion.

One would be glad also to have more distinct evidence of episcopal authority being exercised by the Bishops of Dorchester over Cambridgeshire before the transference of the see to Lincoln. That Remigius, by whom the see was, by the royal license, transferred, somewhere about 1072, from the banks of the Thames to those of the Witham, did not only claim but actually exercise episcopal authority within its limits, and thus regarded the county of Cambridge as a portion of the old diocese of Dorchester, is proved by his consecrating Symeon (the brother of Walkelin of Winchester, and therefore of some kin to the Conqueror) as abbot in 1082. The monks, it is true, were indignant at this recognition of an episcopal claim, in contravention of the privilege granted to the convent long years before of the abbot choosing whom he pleased to give him his benediction, but this does not affect the fact that Remigius claimed to perform episcopal acts—in Anselm's words "to do those things which no one but a diocesan bishop could do"—in the county of Cambridge, and what is more, in the isle and abbey of Ely, and that, except by the recalcitrant monks, here as ever anxious to throw off episcopal authority and assert their own independence, the claim was generally allowed.

That even within the Isle of Ely Remigius was not without authority we see from the terms of the prohibition issued by William against his claiming any novel rights there. "Defendite ne Remigius Episcopus novas consuetudines requirat intra Insulam de Ely. Nolo enim ut ibi habeat nisi illud quod antecessor ejus habuit tempore Regis Ædwardi¹." In the time of the Confessor therefore it is clear that Remigius' predecessors, the bishops of Dorchester, had rights within the Isle, though what they were is not stated.

On the next vacancy of the abbacy, Remigius' successor,

¹ Bentham's *Ely*, Appendix, V. 6.

Robert Bloet, stoutly urged his claim to confer the episcopal benediction on Symeon's successor, Richard of Bec, which Richard as stoutly repudiated. The new abbot had already given Henry, who had conferred the abbacy on him, considerable cause of offence. His refusal to be consecrated by the Bishop of Lincoln filled up the measure of his misdeeds, and he was expelled from his office. Richard at once visited Rome, and made a personal appeal to the Pope, by whom he was restored to his dignity. Thomas of Ely does not make it clear from whom he ultimately received the benediction, but it was certainly not from Bloet. This controversy between the Bishop of Lincoln as diocesan and the Abbots of Ely became the chief cause of the separation of Cambridgeshire from the diocese to which for so long a period it had belonged, and the establishment of the new diocese of Ely, a measure which, according to Thomas, Robert Bloet did all in his power to hinder, but ineffectually. The claim to complete independence of episcopal control on which Thomas dilates with so much proud confidence, and the scorn he throws on the "malignant artifices" by which Bloet sought to support his authority will hardly be regarded as proofs of the facts by those who are familiar with monastic annals and the distortions of truth with which they abound, especially when their privileges are in question. There seems, however, to be no doubt that by long standing custom the monastery *had* secured the right of calling in any bishop they pleased to perform necessary episcopal offices for the convent and its staff,—*ad sua sacrandam*—and were not bound to apply for these to the Bishop of Dorchester or Lincoln, and that the Bishop's jurisdiction within the Isle was but small. This however by no means removes it from the territorial area of the diocese.

The fact that Remigius in the first organization of his vast diocese, assigned an archdeacon with local jurisdiction to each of the other counties it comprised, but assigned none to Cam-

bridgeshire, is sometimes urged as a proof that that county did not form an integral part of his diocese, as the others did. This however is based on a misconception. It does indeed shew that the episcopal jurisdiction was so much limited in Cambridgeshire that there was no call for a separate archdeacon there, but it proves no more. The case was the same with Hertfordshire, for which no archdeacon was appointed, and the reason was alike in both. The monastery of St Albans in one county and the monastery of Ely in the other exercised jurisdiction over so large a part of its area that a separate archdeacon was not wanted. What was needed was done by the archdeacon of Huntingdon, to whom Remigius assigned archidiaconal authority over the portions of those two counties which were under his jurisdiction. As Bentham says:

“Whilst the County of *Cambridge* continued part of the Diocese of *Lincoln*, it was under the same archdeacon with *Huntingdonshire* and part of *Hertfordshire*; but the *Isle of Ely* (though sometimes reckoned as part of *Cambridgeshire*) having been always exempt from the jurisdiction of the Bishop of *Lincoln*, or indeed of any other Bishop, the Archidiaconal power thereof was vested in the Abbey of *Ely*, and was exercised by the sacrist of the Church¹.”

Nicholas, the archdeacon of Huntingdon appointed by Remigius, was still in office on the division of the see, and continued archdeacon without any diminution of his jurisdiction, but with two distinct titles and owing allegiance to two episcopal sees, as archdeacon of Huntingdon to his old Bishop, him of Lincoln, and as archdeacon of Cambridge, to the new Bishop, him of Ely. We have here another sufficient evidence that though over one portion of the county, and that a large one, viz., the Isle of Ely, the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Lincoln was nominal rather than real, the whole of Cambridgeshire was regarded as belonging to that diocese, and subject to the authority of the Bishops of Lincoln until the formation of the See of Ely.

¹ Bentham's *Ely*, p. 269.

APPENDIX.

Eadmer *Historia Nova* Lib. iv. p. 79. A (Ed. Paris 1721, fol.) p. 195, Rolls Series.

“His diebus sermo habitus est de Parochia Episcopi Lincolniensis, quæ in nimium tendebatur, eoque processit ut, quoniam ratio christianitatis id utile fore suadebat, Regi et Archiepiscopo cæterisque principibus regni visum fuerit, de ipsa Parochia sumendum quo fieret alter episcopatus, cujus cathedræ principatus poneretur in Abbathia de Heli. Sed Anselmus, quem ipsius negotii summa respiciebat, sciens præter consensum et Romani Pontificis auctoritatem novum Episcopatum nusquam rite institui posse, scripsit ei sic.”

Then follows the letter. After the customary preamble Anselm states the case thus :

* * * * “In Anglia est quidam Episcopatus, scilicet Lincolniensis, cujus Diocesis tam ampla est ut ad ea quæ non nisi ab Episcopali persona fieri queunt unus Episcopus plene sufficere non possit. Quod cum consideraret Rex, et Episcopi...ad utilitatem Ecclesiæ visum consilium est Episcopatum præfatum in duos dividere, ita ut sedes episcopalis in quadam abbatia quæ sita est in Insula vocata Heli et est intra præfatam Diocesim, constituatur, Monachis ibidem permanentibus, sicut sunt multi Episcopatus qui Monachos in matre ecclesia habent, non Canonicos. Quod libenter concedit ipse Episcopus Lincolniensis, Robertus nomine, quia pro iis quæ assumuntur de sua Ecclesia ad instaurandum novum Episcopatum in Heli, tantum Ecclesiæ Lincolniensi restauratur, ut ipse sufficiens et gratum sibi esse fateatur. Cui rei mihi, tum propter prædictam necessitatem, tum propter multitudinem prædictorum qui in hoc consentiunt, visum est ut, salva vestra auctoritate, assensum præberem.”

Matt. Paris *Hist. Angl.* (i. 210, Rolls Series).

“Defuncto Ricardo, qui fuit ultimus abbas in insula, et comitatu de Canteburgh Episcopo Lincolniensi subtracto, huic novo pontifici lege diocesana subijcitur comitatus.”

[Repeated *Chron. Maj.* ii. 136, Rolls Series.]

Giraldus Cambrensis vii. 32, Rolls Series. *Vita S. Remigii*, cap. xxi.

“Hujus (Robert Bloet) tempore, Eliensis Ecclesia per regiam voluntatem et violentiam desiit esse Lincolniensis filia; et facta est cathedraliter principalis, quæ fuerat antea subjugalis. Spaudewic tamen cum pertinentiis suis, quadraginta librarum manerium, a monasterio Eliensi in excambium suscepit.”

Chronica Roberti de Torigny: *Chronicles of the Reign of Stephen*, etc. iv. 95, Rolls Series.

“Mortuo Ricardo filio Ricardi filii comitis Gisliberti monacho Beccensi qui fuit ultimus abbas in insula Heli Henricus rex constituit ibi primum episcopum Herveum. Et comitatus unus scilicet Cantebregesire subtractus episcopo Lincolniensi subditus est huic novo episcopo. Lincolniensi vero remanserunt adhuc octo comitatus sive provinciæ id est Lincolesire, Leicæstresire, Hantonesire [Northampton], Huntendonesire, Hereforthsire, Bedefordsire, Bucinghamsire, Oxinefordsire.”

MONDAY, *May* 19, 1890.

FIFTIETH ANNUAL MEETING.

Professor Hughes, President, in the chair.

The following new members were elected :

Edward Wareham Harry, Esq., C.E., 79, Hills' Road.

Thomas Waraker, LL.D., Trinity Hall.

The following Officers were elected for the next academical year :

President: Professor Hughes, M.A., F.R.S.

Vice-President: Professor Middleton, M.A., F.R.S.

Members of Council:

Professor Jebb, Litt.D.

Rev. Professor Browne, B.D.

Rev. W. Cunningham, D.D.

Baron A. von Hügel, M.A.

Treasurer: W. M. Fawcett, M.A., F.S.A.

Secretary and Librarian: Rev. S. S. Lewis, M.A.

Auditors: J. E. Foster, M.A.

R. Bowes, Esq.

The Annual Report was presented to the Society.

The Council has the pleasure of announcing that No. XXIX. of our *Reports and Communications* (for 1886—1887) has been issued to Members; *Alderman S. Newton's Diary* (1662—

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