

ART. XXIX.—*A Misappropriated Bishop.* By GEORGE WATSON.

*Read at Langholm, July 12th, 1898.*

IT has long been said that there was at one time a Bishop of Penrith. The earliest mention of this alleged fact appears to have occurred in Sir Daniel Fleming's "Description of the County of Cumberland," written in 1671, but not published until 1889, when it appeared in the Tract Series of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archæological Society. In his brief reference to Penrith, Sir Daniel says: "The church is a beautiful edifice, and had the honour of a Suffragan Bishop." By the way, the "beautiful edifice" was the church Dr. Todd demolished, not the far-from-beautiful one he built.

The story of the Bishop of Penrith was repeated in a History of Cumberland, one of a series of early county histories by Thos. Cox, entitled "Magna Britannia," published in 1720 and based upon Camden's "Britannica" which is largely quoted, but Camden's text is so much interlarded with the author's own statements that the source of information is often doubtful. Such is the case when we are again told that

Penrith Church is a handsome and spacious edifice sufficient for the reception of the inhabitants for God's worship, and was in King Henry the Eighth's time honoured with the title of a Suffragan Bishop.

The reference to the church is evidently from Camden, who says:

Not far from the confluence of Eamot and Loder, at which is the round trench called King Arthur's Table, stands Penrith, *i.e.*, A red hill or head; for both the earth hereabouts and the stone of which it is built are reddish, 'tis commonly called Perith, and is a noted little market town with a pretty handsom church.

Camden

Camden, however, makes no mention of its alleged Bishop, and as the records of the diocese and all subsequent county histories are equally silent on the subject it would probably have been forgotten long ago had it not been crystallised in Crockford's Clerical Directory, where, in the column of Bishop's Suffragans it stands

1537 John Bird Bishop of Penrith.

Notwithstanding this, however, the Calendars of State Papers prove that it was not from Penrith that John Bird took his title, and that he never had any connection with the diocese of Carlisle. It was all a mistake, originating in the vague and confused way of spelling names in the time of Henry the Eighth.

To make this clear I will as briefly as possible re-count Henry the Eighth's procedure in establishing a body of assistant or deputy bishops, under the names of "Bishop's Suffragans." In 1534 the King instructed the Parliament to pass several important Acts dealing with the affairs of the Church, one of which was to make provision for 26 suffragans to act under existing bishops; and 26 towns were specified from which the new suffragans might take their titles. The names of the towns only were stated, without any mention of the county or dioceses in which they were situated, and as some of them are designated by popular names other than their proper ones, no wonder that mistakes have arisen. The names as stated in the Act were Thetford, Ipswich, Colchester, Dover, Guilford, Southampton, Taunton, Shaftsbury, Molton, Marlborough, Bedford, Leicester, Gloucester, Sherbury, Bristow, Penreth, Bridgewater, Nottingham, Grantham, Hull, Huntingdon, Cambridge, Pereth, and Berwick, and St. Germans in Cornwall and the Isle of Wight. Subsequent mention in the State papers makes it clear that "Britow" was Bristol, "Sherbury," Shrewsbury; "Pereth," Penrith, Cumberland, while Penreth was undoubtedly one  
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of the numerous "Pens" in Wales; it is grouped in the list with the towns in the south-west along with Bridgewater and Bristol, and as all the other towns mentioned are in England, if Wales with its four bishoprics was to have one title-giving town it could only be that designated as Penreth.

In the state papers of Henry the VIII.'s time Penrith, Cumberland, is frequently mentioned in connection with the affairs of the Border Counties by its popular name Pereth or Peryth, occasionally as Penrith, when written by a Cumbrian correspondent, in which case the scribe or editor of the Record Office generally adds "Pereth" in a parentheses as an explanation. As we have seen, the learned Camden, writing about 50 years after the Bishop's Suffragans Act was passed, says "Penrith" was commonly called "Pereth," and to this day old fashioned folks may be heard speaking of Penrith as "Pe-reth."

Having shown what place John Bird was not bishop of, I will adduce evidence of his actual location, for John was a real bishop, only he got misplaced. The Act of 1534 made it imperative that a suffragan's title must be one of the 26 towns named—not necessarily in the diocese to which he was attached, but it must be one in the same archiepiscopal Province; also that he must be nominated along with another cleric by the Bishop requiring his services, for the king to choose one. The following is a copy of the king's grant in the case of John Bird, or Byrde :

1537—John Byrde, S.T.P., Provincial of the Order of Friars Carmalites of the city of London, to be suffragan bishop of Penreth, in the province of Canterbury; the said John having been nominated with Hugh Burneby, priest regular by Robet, Bishop of Llandaff, Hampton Court, 11 June, 29 Hen. VIII. Del. Westm. 15th June, P.S.

Shortly before in the Calendars is a list of Cromwell's Remembrances (matters for immediate attention) one of which

which is "For the Suffragan of Landaphe Bill" and in March preceding in a list of Easter preachers stands "Mr. Provincial of White Friars" with reference to the foot note "John Bird, D.D., who was made suffragan bishop of Penrith, 15 June, 1537, and was afterwards bishop of Bangor and Chester." Inquiry by letter at the Diocesan Registry, Bangor, elicited this courteous reply from Mr. R. Hughes Pritchard, M.A., the bishop's secretary :

John Bird, or Birde, was made Bishop of Bangor in 1539, John Bird, S.T.P., University of Oxford. The last provincial of the Order of Carmalites. Suffragan Bishop of Pentruth. He was translated from Bangor in 1541, and became the first Bishop of Chester.

Now there are 90 places in Wales having "Pen" for the first syllable of their names, yet none of them now appears as Pentruth. It was probably the place now known as Pentreith in the diocese of St. Davids, Cardiganshire. But from whatever "Pen" John Bird took his title, it was for the diocese of Llandaff, in the province of Canterbury, and not Penrith in the diocese of Carlisle, and province of York. The appointment of a suffragan for Robert Holgate, bishop of Llandaff, was not for ecclesiastical purposes. Holgate had then been only three months bishop of Llandaff. He had been chaplain to Thomas Cromwell, Henry the Eighth's minister, who promoted him to be Master of the Order of Sempryng in Lincolnshire, and Prior of Watton in Yorkshire, which positions he held when in October, 1536, the great risings in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, known as Aske's Rebellion and the Pilgrimage of Grace, took place, the people being enraged at the king's oppressive taxations, abolition of popular holidays, and above all the dissolution of the monasteries. All these the rebels laid at Cromwell's door, and secured for him their intense hatred, which they vented upon two of his servants by hanging one and  
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baiting the other to death with dogs with a bull's skin upon his back.

With these terrible object lessons before him Robert Holgate, knowing what he might expect if he fell into the rebel's hands, fled to Cromwell, who five months after procured him the bishopric of Llandaff. Then three months later he with the bishop of Durham and certain of the loyal county gentlemen were constituted "The Council of the North" at York, for the trial and wholesale execution of the rebels. The two bishops thus employed were for the time relieved of their episcopal duties by each having a suffragan appointed under the recent Act—on June 12th, 1537, Thos. Spark for the bishop of Durham, with the title of bishop of Berwick, and on the 15th of the same month John Bird for the bishop of Llandaff as bishop of Penreth, in the Province of Canterbury. The Bishop of Durham was president of the Council up to June 1538, when the king requiring his constant presence at court appointed the bishop of Llandaff president, and at the end of that year he was still at York, engaged in his secular duties, while John Bird performed the episcopal duties of the See of Llandaff, which he continued to do until August 26th, 1539, when he was made bishop of Bangor, and in 1542 he became first bishop of the newly-created diocese of Chester.

Inconvenience has frequently been experienced by the places from which suffragans' titles were to be taken, having been arbitrarily fixed by Act of Parliament, which often made it necessary to take a title from a town in a diocese other than that for which he was appointed. This was the case ten years ago, when the Rev. J. J. Pulleine, being appointed suffragan to the bishop of Ripon, took his title from Penrith in the diocese of Carlisle, for Penrith by its old name of Pereth was one of the title-giving places of the 1534, Act and one of the three in the province of York mentioned in the Act, thus presenting the

the curious anomaly of a Bishop of Penrith who was not Penrith's bishop. In the following year however the late Bishop of Carlisle got an amended Act passed by which a bishop's suffragan can take his title from any place in his own diocese, when the suffragan for Ripon became bishop of Richmond and Penrith's year of honour in giving a title to a bishop came to an end.

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NOTE.—The statement that the place from which John Bird took his title was probably Pentreith, in the Diocese of St. David's, and not Penrith in the Diocese of Carlisle, is placed beyond dispute by the following entry in Gairdner's Calendars of State Papers, 1539.—“Bishopric of Bangor. Assent to the election of John Byrde, Suffragan of the Bishop of Llandaff, as Bishop of Bangor, vice Capon translated. 21 Aug. 31st Hen. 8th.”

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