

ART. XIII.—*Fullers and Freeholders of the Parish of Grasmere.* By MISS M. L. ARMITT.

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### I.—THE MILLS.

WHEN the first tourists penetrated the Lake District in the late eighteenth century, by means of the newly-made turnpike road, they regarded it as recently discovered country. They came in search of the picturesque, armed with a landscape mirror and a guide-book that directed them to the "stations" or views where the instrument might be best used; and they alternately shuddered and glowed over the prospect unfolded in precipice, water-fall and lake. Here, it seemed to them, nature ruled supreme; while only the lowly cot of herdsman or shepherd relieved occasionally the desolate mountain solitude. Of the life within the vales, then or in former times, they knew and suspected nothing; and little guessed the chapter of home trades and industries that had once given animation to the landscape and wealth to a thrifty and prosperous folk. The flare of the furnaces that of old lit up the forests, as the ironworkers smelted the ore in their primitive hearths; the hum of the housewife's wheel within the numerous cottages, the click of the weaver's loom, the creak of the great water wheel where it slowly revolved under the flow of beck or sike for the walk-mill, the spread of the home-spun cloth stretched on the tenters in the fields, were beyond the wildest dreams of their very fervid imaginations.\*

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\* One of the first of them was in time to see this striking sight in Kendal itself, and spoke of it in his inimitable way. "I entered Kendal almost in the dark, and could distinguish only a shadow of the castle on a hill, and tenter-grounds, spread far and wide round the town." Gray's *Letter from the Lakes*.

It was left to the antiquary to reconstruct the past ; to find the buried hearths and the cinder-heaps that nature had almost won back to herself ; to trace the dry sluices in deep woods and lonely places through which the mill-race once flowed ; to learn from place-name the site of vanished forge or of ground where cloth was stretched ; and to confirm by search in early documents the tale told by the scars still carried on the earth's surface.\*

Both the smelting of iron and the fulling of cloth were in former times extensively carried on in those valleys of Lakeland that drain their water into the great Bay of Morecambe. But the two industries did not apparently intermingle. A line which coincided with the political line of boundary, running by the lake of Windermere up the Brathay and Little Langdale beck to the top of Wrynose Pass, appears to have divided the two. On the one side Lancashire, with Ulverston and Dalton as centres, threw itself into the iron trade which early occupied those places ; and the ore found so abundantly in their neighbourhood was carried considerable distances by pack-horses, for smelting in the forest. On the other side, Westmorland devoted itself to the trade in woollen cloths, which from a time earlier than is generally stated, engrossed the energies of the chief town, Kendal, as well as the lands round about. On this line of boundary, the folk may be said to have stood back to back, looking two ways, east and west. And to this day the old Windermere fishermen and boatmen will speak in a remote and guarded fashion of the land behind the opposite shore, by the name of Furness Fells.

The start of Kendal's trade in cloth is uncertain, but by Tudor times the town was supplying the ordinary citizen of London with stuff for his work-a-day doublet ; and Kendal cloth and Kendal green (a very successful dye

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\* See reports on Furness Bloomeries, by Messrs. W. G. Collingwood and H. S. Cowper. These *Transactions*, vol. xv.

produced there) were familiar in the wool market. The canny Westmorland man had discovered the value of his hardy sheep, that could roam on limitless mountain pastures almost free; for from their fleece he could make up a cloth, durable if rough, that (aided by his own thrifty, honest ways of living and of dealing), he was able to put cheap upon the market, and so do a wider business among the commonality than the more accomplished weaver could with his fine fabrics, which were bought only by the nobles. There is no proof that John Kemp, who in 1331 came over from Flanders with apprentices and servants to pursue his improved art of weaving under letters of protection from Edward III. settled in Kendal\*; nor is he likely to have pushed so far from that eastern coast which was in close shipping and trading connection with the Netherlands. But other immigrants followed him, spreading and settling further inland, and it is possible that some Flemish weaver did penetrate as far as our county and teach to Westmorland folk the improved methods of his country. At any rate, Kendal cloth is named in enactments of the close of the fourteenth century†, and the increase of the trade produced, as time went on, an ever widening circle of home productions round the town, which penetrated the far recesses of the Rothay and the Brathay, and planted upon barren fells prosperous homesteads, the seats of tradesmen and of freeholders.

It is the purpose of this paper to trace, in such fragmentary fashion as a few unpublished records permit, the growth of this trade within the parish of Grasmere, more especially as it relates to the family of Benson and to the freeholds acquired by them and by the Brathwaites.

The fulling-mill, or walk-mill, as it was here called, was in Norman times a usual adjunct to the manor. It was the property of the lord, like the corn-mill, and to it the folk carried the rough cloth they spun and wove for their

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\* See Cunningham's *Alien Immigrants*.

† Nicholson's *Annals of Kendal*.

own wear, in order to have it dressed. One such mill seems to have supplied the needs of this remote section of the Barony of Kendal down to 1335. This was situated at Grasmere, where also stood the immemorial church, serving the three townships that formed the parish, viz., Grasmere, Langdale, and Loughrigg and "beneath moss,"—an expression which covered Rydal and the half of Ambleside. This mill is mentioned in the Inquisitions of William de Lindesey, 1283; of Ingelram de Gynes, 1324, (when it brought in 6s. 8d. to the lord); and of Christiana his widow in 1355. It was seemingly found up to that date sufficient for the cloth produced and worn in the whole of the parish.

The first additional mill of which we have evidence was planted in Loughrigg, where the homesteads are scattered, and the soil rocky and thin. We learn this from a rental of the Richmond fee, belonging to the end of the fourteenth century, which exists at Levens. The document shows how the circle of the fulling industry was widening from Kendal; through Undermillbeck and Applethwaite, it had spread to Troutbeck, where already at that date three walk-mills were at work, paying severally 3s. 4d., 15s. 9d., and 15s. to the lord, and held each by two or three men in partnership, a fact that seems to bespeak their commercial value. The customary Grasmere mill was worked at that time by one Rad. de Grenerige, who paid a rent of one mark, 13s. 4d., as against the half mark of 1324. And the new fulling-mill for Loughrigg, mentioned for the first time, was worked by one John Walker, who paid a quarter mark, or 3s. 4d. for rent; and who probably acquired his surname from his trade.

This small beginning of what probably denoted the rise of a cloth trade within the parish, was rapidly followed up; and within the next fifty years, as a document of 1453 shows,\* an additional mill was set up in

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\* Ministers Account, Bdle. 644, No. 10444, Public Record Office.

Grasmere, paying 1s. 8d., another in Ambleside (stated to have been constructed anew) paying 1s. 1½d., and two in Langdale, paying 2s. 2½d.; making already a total with the Loughrigg one, of six mills in the parish. This extraordinary increase must be ascribed, not alone to the increased demand for Kendal cloth, but to the commercial spirit of the lord of the manor. The family of Parr had long held one half the barony of Kendal, including the castle of Kendal and half the town, and for their zeal in fighting during the Wars of the Roses on the Yorkist side, which had few adherents among the knights of Westmorland and the north, they were rewarded by Edward IV., when he came to the throne, with the other half of the barony; the heirs of the lord, the Duke of Somerset, being passed over on his death in 1444, in favour of Sir William Parr and his heirs, with reversion to his brother Sir Thomas Parr. This change from a distant and either noble or royal lord to a resident one of practical ability, had a marked effect upon those portions of our parish which were affected by it, as is shown by the rental, preserved at Sizergh, of the year 1493-4, which was made up after Henry VII. had gained the crown, and recovered for his mother (the daughter of the Duke) her inheritance in the barony. This rental accounts for—besides the walk-mill in Loughrigg paying a quarter-mark—three in Grasmere, three in Langdale, and three in Ambleside, making now a total of ten mills within those portions of the parish which belonged to the Richmond fee alone. It expressly states too that the third mill in each township was a new one, and (in the case of Grasmere and Ambleside) constructed in the time when Sir William Parr had been holder of the lordship. These new mills moreover seem to have been let out on a fresh principle, for it is stated that they are demised by the year to their various holders, John Hawkerigge for Grasmere, Robert Wylkynson and his “fellows” for Langdale, and Thomas Robynson Jacson for Ambleside, at a rent of 20d. or a quarter mark for the year.

The next document to be quoted, one of 21-22 Henry VII. (1506-7), has been lately looked up in the Record Office.\* The accounts concerning the mills are less full, but we gain one or two interesting facts from them. For instance, in a statement that a walk-mill lately set up under the chapel of Troutbeck has been pulled down by the officers of the Lady Margaret, Countess of Richmond, lest damage should be caused by it to the fish breeding in Windermere, we have the first record hitherto found of that chapel, though it doubtless existed at a much earlier date. The three Ambleside mills were now all paying a quarter mark; they were worked severally by Thomas Brathwayte, by three members of the family Jackson, and by John and Gilbert Brathwayte. For Loughrigg the grave or bailiff accounts for—besides the tenants' rents, with improvements and enclosures that denote prosperity—the sum of 2s., received from some one whose name is left blank, for two walk-mills newly built there.

This is the first rental—so far found—in which occurs the name of a family destined to play a great part in the milling industry of the three townships, and to increase not only in wealth, but in number to an extraordinary extent. Three-quarters of a century barely elapse before they are found occupying estates as customary tenants on almost every stream in the district outside Ambleside capable of turning a mill, and possessed of valuable freeholds; while the church register from its commencement in 1571 to the middle of the seventeenth century is crowded with the baptism of their children, their marriages and burials, to the utter confusion of the genealogist.

The first Benson, indeed, of whom we have found record in the parish is John, who acted as reeve or grave of Grasmere in the years 1485-6, and again in 1489-90. In the nineteenth year of Edward IV.—that is, in 1480—

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\* Ministers' Accounts, Henry VII., 877.

he purchased a tenement in Grasmere from one John Hunter, called Banerig or Baynrig.\* The purchase is a significant one. Bainrigg is an estate lying between Grasmere and Rydal lakes, the river hemming it in below, and the rocky top of Whitemoss (common land of Grasmere township) above. It was one of the few freeholds in the barony of Kendal, and the quaint admittance of the holder at a later time to the court of Sir James Bellingham (who possessed the Lumley fee in the reign of James I.), recites the dignity of its tenure:—†

Bainriggs. Manorium de Staueley; John Fleming, Esqre holdeth off Sir Ja Bellingham knight off his manor off Staueley by doinge suite off Court yeerly, and paying yeerly one pound off Comyn, or two pence in monye, those Tenne Acres off Land or thereaboutes lying and being in Gresmire, nye unto or adioyning unto gresmire Tarne And holdeth ye premisses by an Ancyent Charter; And it is called Baineriggs; Late in ye Tenure of Robt Bainriggs.

The tradition of its status, and of its former possessors having left their name to it, is repeated in writing of the eighteenth century.‡ It appears as a nameless freehold at the close of the fourteenth century in rentals of both the Lindesey and the Lumley fees, and would seem therefore to have been divided at the great parting of the barony in 1246 between William de Lancaster's heirs. The Lindesey one says "Henry de Banrige holds of the lord a tenement in Gresmyer by fealty and half a pound of cumin or 2d." The Lumley (1375) heads the men of "Gresmer" with Richard de Baynbrig, who "holds one tenement, it renders per annum 30s. 6d. and one pound of cumin." In this and a more fragmentary roll Richard's name is further spelt Baynbriget and Baynerigh.§ By 1480 however when John Benson

\* Rydal Hall MSS. Sir D. Fleming's list of his writings.

† From a copy procured by Sir D. Fleming.

‡ Rydal Hall MSS. Statement of William Scott, who held it at that time as customary land from the manor of Rydal. The family of de Baynbrig or Banrig may have belonged originally to Bainbryg in Yorkshire. The name came to be not uncommon as a surname.

§ These rentals are at Levens Hall.

purchased it (or part of it), it was no longer in possession of the de Bainbrigg or de Bainrigg family; and it may well have been he who constructed the new mill there on the Rothay, of which we first hear in 1493. But he was not then working it; and a deed at Rydal, in which he is called John senior, shows that he parted with the estate (or part of it) to John Fleming, lord of Rydal, in the year 1487. Some links in our chain of evidence are wanting; for Bainrigg is again to be found in possession of a Benson in 1631 and 1633.

Shortly after John Benson's appearance as a purchaser of freehold in Grasmere, several members of the family are shown to be working out improvements in Langdale. That township indeed was astir; for the document of 1506-7 accounts for several houses newly built, and for the enclosure of three intakes containing three roods from the lady of the manor's waste by one Thomas Grygge; as well as, among the "Rents of divers Intakkes, with 12d. of the rent of John Benson, William Benson, and Robert Benson for one intake newly enclosed lying at the foot of Langden, containing  $5\frac{1}{2}$  acres by estimation . . . and 1d. for the rent of John Benson for one intake containing by estimation — acres yearly."

Now it is difficult not to associate these enclosures of the waste fell-land with the business of the walk-mill. The stretching and drying of the cloth upon tenters could be done on barren, rocky ground, worthless for agriculture; and the Old Mill Lands of Ambleside, utilized for that purpose, were full of knolls and hummocks of rock. Enterprising fullers, bent on new ventures, would find in our mountain valleys not only an abundant water power for their mills, but cheap land to be had for their drying grounds; and these may have been the reasons for their rapid invasion of them for their cloth trade. Later on, in 1593, a Langdale walk-mill is found to be owned by the Grigg family, and several, as we shall see, by Bensons. A partnership of three men, indeed, implies considerable enterprise and resultant trade.

In little over half a century, when our next evidence is dated, the Benson clan is found to be already in possession of wealth in money and in land, and to have allied itself by marriage with various prominent and wealthy families in the neighbourhood of Kendal. Outside our bounds, William the tradesmen of that town is shown by his will, dated 1568,\* to have possessed 104½ oz. of silver plate; while his stock-in-trade included wool and yarn, "metes and measures," and "ashe stangs"—perhaps the tenters or stretching poles for the cloth. Some of the debts owing to him are set down at £145 13s. 3d. Thomas Benson, "gentleman," of Skalthwaitrigge, was able to bequeath in 1610 a sum of money for the use of poor tradesmen of Kendal; and we hear of a William, also gentleman, from whom burgage rents in that town were bought.† Charles Benson of Skelwith, described as "merchant," was investing capital in 1570 by buying a moiety of the advowson of Windermere from Robert Bindlose of Helsington by Kendal‡—the said Robert being likewise "merchant," who not only founded a family in his son "Sir" Robert of Borwick Hall, but acquired lands with which he dowered his daughters.

The will of John Benson, dated 1562 and 1563§, proves the position and importance already attained at that date by the family within the limits of our parish. "Whereas," John declares in the document, which describes him as of Langdale, "I am sated in my demesne as of fee of and in the manor and lordshipe of baybrowne," and as he possesses—the will goes on to say—various other lands and farmholds in Langdale by tenant right, he desires these with all his goods and chattels to be held in trust for his adopted son John, son of his cousin George, until John

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\* *Wills and Inventories of the Archdeaconry of Richmondshire*, Surtees Society.

† *The Boke off Recorde of Kirkhby Kendal*. This gives for the years 1581-2 four shearmen, freemen of the town, of the name of Benson.

‡ Communicated by Mr. G. Browne.

§ Rydal Hall MSS.

shall come of age. Until that time his brother Barnard, the administrator, is to have entire control of the property and the receipts from it except one-third, which is to be reserved for the use of John during his minority. Should John die, Barnard and his heirs are to inherit the land, provided they pay the testator's four daughters for it at the rate of twenty-four years' purchase. The daughters otherwise are to be content with a portion of £13 6s. 8d. (20 marks) each for their children, and if they trouble his executors in the matter, this (comparatively) small legacy even is to be withheld from them. A codicil of the succeeding year, which describes the testator as of "micklelangdaile" and which embodies his dying words, appoints Charles Benson and Thomas Benson as administrators in the place of his brother Barnard, who is already dead. The will makes many bequests, and is evidently that of a wealthy freeholder, the head of his clan, who is determined upon male heirs. He desires to be buried in the choir of Grasmere Church, as near to his wife as conveniently may be. The document enumerates, among the customary tenants of his freehold bearing his own name, John elder of Elterwater, John younger of the same, Michael elder, Michael younger, Edward, Oliver, and Thomas; beside his heir John, his executor Charles and his brothers Thomas and Barnard, and "Sir" Thomas, the curate, who seems to have acted as the scribe—making at least ten householders of the name, almost all of them customary landholders in Langdale.

There is no mention in the will of trade in wool or cloth by which this valuable freehold of Baisbrowne had doubtless been acquired. But of the next purchase of freehold by the family we possess more particulars, which show their commercial status. In 1575 three Bensons bought conjointly from William Fleming, Esq., of Coniston and Rydal, the lordship of all his lands in Loughrigg, belonging to the manor of Rydal, which comprised more than half that section of the township. These three—

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Michael, Edward, and Barnard—partners in trade probably as in purchase, are described in the document\* as clothiers. Now the clothier in the general sense was a dealer in cloth who bought from the home weaver, collecting the stuff to sell again in large quantities. He was early the subject of an Act of Parliament, for he had become in many cases the oppressor of the weaver, forcing down the prices of production, and sometimes even possessing the looms, which he hired out at an exorbitant price to workmen, who were forced to sell their work to him at his own quotation. A law therefore forbade his owning more than one loom. In Yorkshire, however, the term clothier is said to have been applied to the fuller or dresser of cloth, and it may have been so used in this district. The enactments concerning the cloth trade issued by the town of Kendal use the word "shearman," as covering the fuller, the dresser, and the dyer.†

This firm of Bensons may well have united all the three branches of trade, and have bought the cloth straight from the home weavers (thus saving these the long transit of their goods to the Kendal market over a very bad road), and have fulled and dyed it at their own mills.

With capital at their command and numerous mills, and a large relationship that formed something like a corporation or guild, there could be no difficulty in carrying the enterprise through to the end; and it is quite possible that their gangs of pack-horses conveyed the rolls of stuff straight to London, there to be sold in the open market.‡ They would thus be clothiers in the largest sense.

The deed in question shows how strong numerically the family was in Loughrigg, as well as in Langdale and

\* It is a copy of the original made by John Banks in 1660, and is at Rydal Hall.

† See *Boke off Recorde*, pp. 142, 145 and 146.

‡ In connection with the transit of cloth from the north, it is interesting to recall the tradition of the origin of the great fair of Stourbridge. A Kendal merchant, it is said, getting his cloth wet by the way, decided to sell it on the spot for what it would fetch. He did a better business than in London, and next year returned—and so started the fair.

Elterwater. Fourteen houses or farmholds were included in this purchase of freehold, and no fewer than eight of these were in the customary holding of Bensons. Elizabeth, widow of Barnard, held a large one at the Fould of the high customary rent of 13s. 9d., besides a small one of 6d. rent. Another at the Fould (rent, 4s. 4d.) was held by Agnes, widow of Robert; and a third there (rent, 3s. 5d.) by a third widow Mabell, relict of Thomas. Of the three purchasers Michael himself owned Coat How, which had hitherto paid a lord's rent of 5s. 9d.; Barnard owned Miller Bridge (rent, 9s. 0d.) and Cockstone (rent, 2s. 4d.); while Edward, who had hitherto possessed no holding in his own name, and was doubtless a son of one of the widows, took as his share of the purchase the freehold of a large holding not named (rent, 15s. 4d.), "now and late" in the possession of Mabel, widow, and of John.

The lordship of the remaining houses fell to Michael and Barnard, each of course securing his own special property in freehold; while Michael took the lion's share in nine other holdings, including the Fould, which was to remain a freehold in the hands of one branch of the family for long.

But before tracing more particularly the history of the freeholds in the parish, three of which accrued from this purchase and maintained their standing—namely, Coat How, Fould, and Miller Bridge—it may be well to continue the numerical record of the family in other quarters of the parish and the mills they possessed, as far as these can be gleaned from casual documents and parish registers.

The tale of the Langdale Bensons is not complete with those in the manor of Baisbrowne. There were paying to the Marquis fee in that township in 1591 or 1593\*

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\* I have seen two MS. copies of the inquisition held at Kendal to inquire into the lands held by the last of the Parrs (who was Marquis of Northampton), and they give different dates.

Solomon, whose important holding paid a lord's rent of 11s. 2d.; Robert, rent 2s. 6d.; and William, 1s. 4d.; while an Edward paid 3d. for a small tenement. Now three of these—Solomon, Robert, and William—as well as a widow of one Michael Benson, paid separate rents “for Milne Farme” (severally 2s. 3d., 6d., 3d., and 5d.), showing that then or recently four mills were worked by the family in that fee, beside another by George Grigg. We know from documents that Solomon was seated at Thrang. William is probably he who is described in the register of 1581 as “of Langdale,” and “of Walthait” in 1591—Walthwaite being a substantial holding situate on Megs Gill near the chapel. William “de walthat” (1612) was succeeded by George (1625) and by William, contemporaneous with whom in 1655 was John of Walthwaite, so that the mill (supposing it to have been there) may have been worked, as so frequently happened, by partners. A Michael “of Langden” appears in the register in 1579 and 1583, and Robert “of Langden” in 1587. One of them possibly had the mill on the stream that flows from Stickle Tarn, which gained for it and the adjacent homestead the name of Millbeck. These by no means exhaust the Bensons of Langdale who appear in the register; but only a John need be mentioned (1618 and 1622), who is described as of Wodhead in Langdale, and an Edward “of Colleth,” who was buried in 1578.

A mill-slucice is plainly to be seen in the woods above Colwith and Hacket Forge, which may have turned a wheel besides the furnace one. The Elterwater corn-mill was perhaps served by the sike that trickles past the hall; and in connection with the smallness of the streams sometimes associated with a mill, it must be remembered that the reservoirs of bog and moss and tarn from which they took their rise were much larger then than now. At Skelwith Bridge, where a wheel still works the saw-mill, there must have been from early times a mill. Indeed, two mills—corn and bark—are remembered, which were

worked (like the twin Ambleside ones) by one current. Instead, however, of this being conducted from one to another by a wooden trough, two wheels were set closely side by side within it, and these propelled a mill situated on either bank. A man still living remembers having crept in between these wheels to oil the gear. Later the position of the mills was changed, and a pool—only recently filled up—lay between the two as a reservoir of supply. Jeremiah Coward of Skelwith Bridge, whose High and Low Bobbin Mills are set down in the township valuation book of 1843 as worth £30 and £20, and his corn-mill at £30 (making three!) is said to have constructed the weir above the fall, and thereby involved himself in a law-suit with the owner of the opposite bank.

Now bark-mills are known in many cases to have taken the place of derelict walk-mills, and this may have been the case at Skelwith Bridge. We know of no Benson however having occupied the premises, unless Charles, merchant, "of Skelwith" did. In the middle of the seventeenth century a certain Reginald Holme was the miller there, a man sufficiently marked for mention, even if he were not a fuller. He united, strangely enough, a turbulent spirit with the Quaker tenets. Two odd entries in Sir Daniel Fleming's Account Book refer to him.

January 29, 1688. Spent in ale with my cosen Tho. & Rob. Brathwait, Mr Nicoldson & his son Daniel, Renhold Brathwait, Ed. Benson, Rob. Partrigg, & others when we fill'd up y<sup>e</sup> Quakers Mill-dam att Skellat-bridge ... .. 00<sup>li</sup> . 01<sup>s</sup> . 06<sup>d</sup>

This must have been a lively scene, and there would be plenty of willing helpers with the spade under this heading of two magistrates and various prominent estatesmen, while the ale went round. But what it was all about, we do not know. It seems unlikely, had it been a coercive measure to extract church rates from the unwilling Friend, that Mr. Robert Brathwaite would have assisted, for he himself was refusing at that very time to

pay church tithes, as we shall see. And another punitive expedition was necessary.

March 13. Spent with my Cosen Brathwhait, Ren. Brathwhait, & James Johnston, when wee [went] to pull downe ye Quakers Mill-dam ... .. 00<sup>li</sup> . 01<sup>s</sup> . 06<sup>d</sup>

Trouble gathered round Reginald. In 1676, the Friends decided at their Lancaster Quarterly Meeting that as he had so long resisted their counsel for a settlement of his dispute with one Thomas R., that the latter was justified in having recourse to the law. The climax came in 1684, when three men (chosen from a distance) were deputed to take legal possession of Reginald's premises. The result was not agreeable. Reginald, assisted by his sons John, Jacob, George, and by his daughter Dorothy, "did also riotously fall upon them, beat, and abuse them, and did also threaten them and speak very contemptuously concerning their authority."\* For this proceeding, a warrant was issued for the arrest of the whole Holme family. We hear of Reginald later at Clappersgate, divorced from his mill.

Just a little lower down the valley, on a rill falling from Loughrigg, is the homestead still called Millbrow, and close beside it is a field called Tenter Close, showing where the cloth was carried from the mill to stretch and dry. The first mention of Millbrow in the register shows it in possession of a Benson; for Francis of Millbrow was buried in 1655, and succeeded by a George. Higher up, Tarn Foot in Loughrigg was theirs, whence an Edward in 1654 was married; while in 1656 James Benson "o' th' Tarnefoot" (who must have been a dealer in cattle) paid the squire of Rydal for the grazing of "5 Oxen in ye fogg a fourthnight." It was perhaps this James to whom Squire Daniel let his fishing in the Brathay and Elterwater from 1666 onward. In 1681 Bernard of the Fould leased the fishing of Elterwater and

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\* Rydal Hall Papers.

Loughrigg Tarn, but he was a bad payer, and bills were required to cover his obligations. From 1652 John of How in Loughrigg had children baptized.

Loughrigg indeed, with Little Loughrigg—a name applied to the arm of the fell that stretched between the tarn and Skelwith Pool—abounded in Bensons. Their stronghold perhaps was the Fould, even before the purchase of its freehold, for there were three families seated there then, as we have seen. This little group of homesteads is lifted a little above that charming central hollow of Loughrigg that holds the mirroring tarn. About it stretch mountain pastures that would give excellent grazing to the small and hardy pack-horses of the clothiers, for which no doubt the smithy (which tradition asserts to have once stood here) was required. Above on the fells wandered the sheep that made the wealth of the place. No water flows past the Fould, but springs abound; and in the open fell that rises just behind the hamlet lies a pool called to this day Tenter's Pond, with a close beside it called Tenters. Perhaps the dyeing would be done by means of the abundant wells that spring about the place, and here the grey home-spun would first be dipped in yellow dye got from the dyer's broom (*genista tinctoria*) that grows wild in the district, and then in woad, to come out the durable Kendal green that was so much valued; or plunged in vats containing the mountain lichen, easily gathered at hand,\* which produced the deep red colour called "murrey," and which commanded a higher price on the market than the green.

At High Close, another important holding of the family, there is likewise no documentary evidence of a mill, though there was trade (as will be shown); but on the Rothay side of Loughrigg there was the Bainrigg mill already mentioned, another possibly at Coat How,

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\* As late as 1772 the Rev. W. Gilpin met old people and children out collecting this lichen for dye, as he tells in his *Observations*. Mr. J. A. Martindale kindly informs me that the species was probably *lecanora parella* or *l. tartarea*.

and a last certainly at Miller Bridge, all of them originally in the hands of Bensons.

For the township of Grasmere, where the first manorial walk-mill stood, we have less evidence ; while the multiplicity of Bensons shown in the register is baffling. There is still a tradition that the Langdale folk used to carry their cloth over the mountain at Blea Rigg to be dressed in Grasmere ; and that they paid a small toll to their neighbour township, for keeping the road open to them.\* If the tradition be correct, it must be referred to a very early period, before the walk-mills were introduced into Langdale ; and it would seem to point to the fact that the original lord's mill in Grasmere was situated on one of the higher western tributaries of the Rothay. On each of these tributaries Bensons are found, when the records become explicit—for at first they describe a man only as "of Grasmere" or later "of Easdale." They were at Blintarn Gill from the last quarter of the sixteenth century ; a John there having children baptized in 1574 and 1577 ; and another John in 1611. They also emerge at "Brymarhead," where a John begot another John in 1616. They were at Far Easdale, where a vanished homestead is associated with their name. A Francis Benson who was probably of Easdale, heads a rental for 1593 of the Marquis fee (in which he is unfortunately the only tenant specified by name), and is there stated to have paid a rent of 6s. 2d. It is no doubt his descendant Bernard who occupies the same position in a rental of 1675, paying 6s. 2½d. to the same fee. There was a James Benson in 1794 at Goody Bridge.

The position of one mill in this quarter is evident from a sluice still plainly visible on Sourmilk-gill in Easdale, which tradition declares to have been used for a walk-mill. There may have been one also at the Wray, where the water tumbles down from Silver How on to a fine

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\* The route started at Long House in Langdale, and descended on the left bank of Blindtarn Gill. It is said to be the one on which the Greens were lost.

meadow; and here we find Bensons settled from the earliest times. Indeed, there seem to have been two, if not three, dwelling-houses at this spot.\* In 1571 Edward Benson of the "Wrai" was buried; in 1580 Bernard sold, or mortgaged "Wray Tenement" to William Fleming Esq., of Rydal, for £16,† while from 1601 to 1615 John of the Wray was having children baptized. Again in 1632 Squire John Fleming's account-books show the receipt of £3 from one Robert Wilson "for 2 yeares rent of Wray tenemt," and those of his executors show in 1645 £1 5s. received from Robert; yet in the same year the entry occurs "Rec. in discharge of a guage of ground of Robert bensons lying at Wrey in Gresmere £12. os. od." and again in 1648, "Rec. of Francis Benson for arrears behind of a morguage of a tenemt. at wrey in gresmire of Robt Benson's £2. os. od." This no doubt is the Robert of Wray buried in 1658; and his successor George had a child baptized from the place in 1685.

Again, in 1643, 1s. od. was paid at the Grasmere Court, on Squire John's death, for his young son William being "found Tennant and nexte heire of wrey Tenemt." In 1662 Squire Daniel Fleming inherited from his uncle a teneiment at Wray (doubtless the same) of the small customary rent of 1s. 5d. It was let to one John Wilson in 1663 for £1, but as he was in arrears of rent, he was quickly followed by John Nicolson, and then by Thomas Green. One of the houses at the Wray may have occupied the site of the modern St. Oswald's, where a barn is remembered to have stood.

The identification of other Bensons of the late sixteenth century with homesteads in Grasmere is impossible. The register shows a Thomas living in 1572, a Michael in 1576, a Robert in 1573, a James in 1573, and Edward in 1576; while a Robert was buried in 1573, and four Johns

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\* The rental of the Lumley fee, at Levens, dated 1375, gives among the tenants William "in le Wrai," who holds two cottages and pays 8d. per annum.

† Rydal Hall MSS.

respectively in 1573, 1582, 1584, and 1586. Three different Johns had children baptized in 1602. One of these we can probably assign to the "above beck" quarter of the township, as a John is specified in 1610 as "of the Forrest syd," and he died in 1654, being succeeded by a John, whose family was on the increase from 1651 to 1667. Another John "of Beckhouse" was a neighbour. There was certainly a walk-mill at one of these holdings, probably turned by the waters of Greenhead Gill, for two fields adjacent still go by the name of Tenters and Tenter's Park.

The name Tenters was also attached to a close (now thrown into allotment gardens) that lay to the left of the road, where it emerges from Town End. If a mill stood here, it may have been turned by the water of the now sluggish ditch that flows under Stock Bridge close by.\*

It would be difficult to "place" more of the Grasmere mills; and the Bensons of Nicols, Moss-side, Thorneyhow, Underhow, and Tail-end—all customary land-holders—were not on becks that could turn a wheel. But we can form some estimate of their number. A rental made out in 1572 on an assignment of dower to the Marquis of Northampton's widow, declares that there were four mills in the Marquis fee, paying a rent of 23s. 4d., which were then decayed. Not one of them could be the indispensable corn-mill, situated on Tongue Gill, whose ruins can now be seen, and where an old miller attended to the grinding of the valley corn within the memory of man.

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\* It is a question whether the word *Stock* as well as *Tenter* may not be associated with the vanished industry. Among the orders drawn up to control the trades of Kendal in the sixteenth century (and which may follow older ones) there is one enacting that shearmen shall not wet and carry their cloth to the mill on Sundays; and the expression used is "to the walk-stock or fulling-mill."—*The Booke of Recordē*, p. 145. Now we have Stock Gill in Ambleside, a stream where mills jostled each other, and where an earlier name "Sledal-beck" seems to have been superseded; and Stock Bridge by the present mill. There is a Stock field in Loughrigg, near the Fould and Tenters, intersected by a sike that never dries. Mill-beck Stock on Mill-beck, flowing into Windermere, was until recent times a mill. The "Maltstocke," for which Sir Daniel Fleming payed 4d. for the repair of in 1668 (Account Book) was no doubt the hand-worked malt-mill in common use.

We have therefore to add, to the three walk-mills in the township of Grasmere, paying together to the Richmond fee 13s. 10½d. in 1494, four more that paid 23s. 4d. to the Marquis fee, making altogether the almost unbelievable total of seven within the township.

Add to this the five paying to the Marquis fee in Langdale, the three specified for Ambleside in the rental of 1507, the two for Loughrigg, and the one which appears to have stood within the manor of Rydal on Scandale-beck, and we arrive at the astounding figure of eighteen walk-mills that were turned by the streams of the parish of Grasmere during the 15th and early 16th centuries. Nor does this figure include the one or more mills that were probably worked in the Benson freehold of Baisbrowne. It is significant that the four Grasmere mills belonging to the Parr's division are declared to be in decay as early as 1572. The wealthy firm of Loughrigg clothiers were in the hey-day of their prosperity in 1575, when they secured their freeholds; and the high-water mark of the fortunes of the Benson family in general may be said to have been reached about this date, when they had yet lost nothing. But the ebb of the tide of trade from our valleys—scarcely perceptible at first—soon became a rapid flow, and mortgages and sales of property, as we shall see in the tale of the freeholds, were soon to become frequent. The customary lands too, held by various members of the Benson clan, were in jeopardy. Others besides Bernard and Robert of the Wray paid a visit to the rich squires of Rydal Hall, bringing money away in their pockets, but leaving compromising parchment behind them. Solomon of the Thrang was in difficulties as early as 1598, when he borrowed £21 from Squire William Fleming; and in order "to save harmless" (as the expression was) his two friends who had stood surety for the loan, he mortgaged to them his tenement in Baisbrowne, of which the rent was 25s. 3½d. In 1601, the debt being not yet paid, he renewed his deed

to them, and this was witnessed among others by Thomas Brathwaite, doubtless of Ambleside Hall. The two bondholders, tired maybe of their obligation, or pressed by Squire William's executors, apparently parted with their deed to Mr. Thomas Brathwaite, of Ambleside; and in the following year that gentleman paid Solomon £45 to gain the whole possession of the property.\* But Solomon, muddled perhaps by his many deeds and mortgages, and truculent as well, refused to acknowledge that his birth-right was now wholly lost. In 1605 he and his son-in-law John Hudson had to appear in court on the complaint of Mr. Brathwaite, where the verdict went against him; for it declared that neither Mrs. Hudson nor any other of the children of Solomon had right or claim to the farmhold, and that Solomon was to pay not only £4 for the plaintiff's costs, but also five marks for contempt of court. But the family hung on apparently to some smaller holding at the Thrang, though still in difficulties, and John of that place in 1625 made over to Mrs. Agnes Fleming of Rydal Hall—not being able to release or redeem the same—his holding at Walthat, rent 13s. 5d., with a close (rent 9d.) that was parcel of the Thrang (rent 6s. 8d.) for the sum of £25. Next year Mrs. Agnes executed a deliverance of Thrang, rent 6s. 11d., to Solomon for the sum of £4, to be paid at Michaelmas.

Squire John Fleming, son of Agnes, held mortgages from the Bensons, not only on the customary estate at the Wray and on the freehold of Bainrigg, but on some portion of Baisbrowne, for in 1631 his account-book shows an entry of £3 4s. received from John Benson as two years "rent" on that place.

The principal Elterwater branch of the family was likewise involved in land transactions of a complicated character. In 1605 Margaret, widow, of Elterwater, and her son Michael cleared an obligation of forty marks to

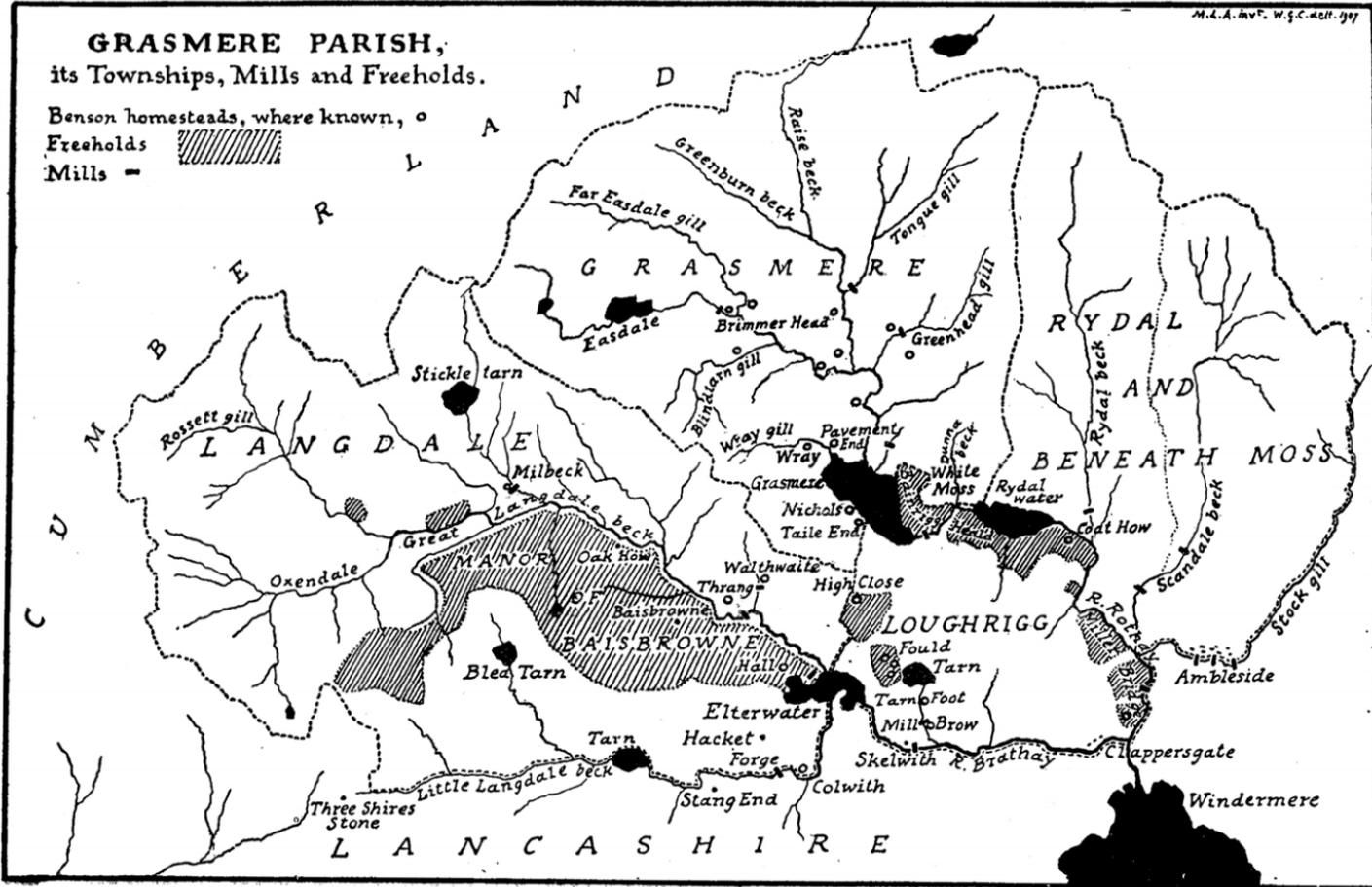
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\* These various deeds connected with the Brathwaites are among the MSS. of Mr. George Browne.



# GRASMERE PARISH, its Townships, Mills and Freeholds.

Benson homesteads, where known, ○  
Freeholds   
Mills -



Mr. Thomas Brathwaite of Ambleside (which is stated to have been incurred as part payment of a tenement at Elterwater sold to them by Thomas) by handing over to him such lands, tenements, &c. situated within the lordships of Langdale and Grasmere as they have bargained and paid for with Mr. George Gilpin of Kentmere. A note at the back of the deed, written by Mr. Gawen Brathwaite, gives the date of Mr. Gilpin's "sale or bargain" of these lands in Langdale to his brother as April 10, 1606. They were subsequently (in 1674) willed by Gawen's son Thomas Braithwaite to his brother Robert under the name of Gilpin's lands. A lawsuit with an Edward Benson seems to have engaged the Brathwaites through the years 1605 to 1611.

The partial recovery of freehold by the Elterwater Bensons will be shown later.

## II.—THE FREEHOLDS.

*Baisbrowne.* The history of the little "manor," which lies between the two head feeders of the Brathay, is a shadowy one for the long years before it came into the hands of the Bensons. First we hear of it as granted by William de Lancaster to the Priory of Conishead. He endowed that house along with other lands and privileges, with all the land of Basebrun, with appurtenances and meadow, which the Prior and Hugh de Borwardel held of him in farm, within these bounds, beginning at Elterwater, and by Elterwater to Elkeslakbec, to Hogeбат, and by the heights of Lingemouthe to Crossedak, and on the road to Little Langden, as far as the enclosed land of Great Langden, so following the hedge as far as Alnetum, from thence across the meadow which the said prior and Hugh held in farm, and following the hedge which the said prior and Hugh made, to the bank of the water of Langden, and along the bank to the aforesaid Elterwater.\*

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\* West's *Antiquities of Furness*. West copied the list of benefactions, of which this is part, from the documents of Mr. Wilson Braddyll, then owner of Conishead. The names are new, almost unrecognizable, being either lost or (probably) corruptly spelt. Is "Hogeбат" Hacket, from which the line of boundary passed to the summit of Lingmoor?

Furthermore William left them on his death in 1246 meadow-land near Elterwater.\*

The intrusion of a Lancashire religious house into this far mountain nook of Westmorland and the barony of Kendal seems singular; and if the prior and canons to reach it had had to follow the road of the descending waters, they would have had a far travel. But from the shores of Morecambe Bay, where their house stood, there is a short cut to it over a watershed. They enjoyed by grant of William the right to fish on the Crake and in Coniston lake. Thence the way was short; either by following Yewdale beck to its source and over the low pass with its steep drop to Colwith (the way the sea-gulls come), or—and more likely—by taking the straight line up Tilberthwaite and over the rise to Little Langdale beck, which they would cross at one of the two ancient fords now marked by stepping-stones, and by the farmstead of Stang-end—a name that commemorates a former wooden or stang bridge.

And William's grant shows that already, with the aid of an active partner, the priory was farming this barren corner, upon the northern slope of Lingmoor. Already an enclosing hedge had been planted, and a bank or dyke thrown up against the Great Langdale beck, that even now is apt to turn the meadows into a lake. With the land veritably theirs, the holy men would no doubt proceed to make an orderly settlement, especially on their newer grant at Elterwater. Their dwelling-house and grange would be built where the hall later stood; and it was they who in all probability erected the corn-mill found afterwards at the spot, where their own oats and rye, along with those of the small homesteads that rose about them on the freehold, could be ground. The religious needs of this far-away nook would be cared for likewise; and in the firm and widely-spread tradition that

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\* Mr. Farrer's *Lancashire Inquests, Extents, &c.*

a chapel once stood on the slope below the Beild, between the road and Little Langdale tarn, we very likely stumble upon an unwritten bit of history.

Next we hear of the Penningtons in this quarter of the parish. They were great landowners in Furness and Cumberland, and also (like the de Lancasters) benefactors to Conishead Priory. The Inquisition of William de Lindesey in 1283 declares that "Alan de Pointon holds Little Langeden which is worth 40s." In 1377 Thomas de Bardsey conveyed to Alan de Penington and his wife Catharine the manor of Langden, which he held in trust from William de Penington. And in 1415 Alan de Penington died seized of the manors of Penington, Tilberthwait, and Langden; to which his brother John, aged 22, succeeded.\* It was probably this Alan who figures in the rental at Levens (date about 1400) as a freeholder of the Richmond or Lindesey fee, as his predecessor does in the document of 1283. "Alan Penyngton knight, holds of the lord the manor of Lyttyllangdall in Strickeland Kettyl with the appurtenances, by homage and fealty and renders yearly [*mutilated*] and venison."

After this there is a blank, until in 1562 we find John Benson of Langdale or "Mickle" Langdale to be in possession of a freehold thereabouts, called the manor of Baisbrowne, where he was resident, along with many of his clan.

Several of these were undoubtedly wealthy men (and of his brother Barnard more will be said), but to him alone belonged (so far) the proud position of freeholder, who could write himself down a gentleman or armiger. We read in Burke's *General Armory* :—

Benson (Baysbrowne, 1546, and Hawkshead, co. Lancaster). Quarterly, erm. and or, a bend engr. gu. surmounted by another plain ar. charged with three trefoils sa. *Crest*—a boar's head erased

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\* Whittaker's *History of Richmondshire*.

ar. muzzled, gorged with a collar, and pendant therefrom an escutcheon az. charged with a trefoil or. *Motto*—Si Deus, quis contra.\*

But the distinction was not destined to be long borne by a Benson of Baisbrowne, though John in his desire for a male heir passed over his daughters, and adopted a relative as son. This heir, John by name, was a minor in 1563, but we soon hear of him as lord of this manor from deeds at Rydal Hall.

In 1574 Queen Elizabeth, as lady of the manor of the lands she had inherited of the barony of Kendal, confirmed her customary tenants in their ancient tenure, along with the amount of the fine or gresssum to be paid by them at change of lord or tenant; which fine—except for the men of Ambleside and Troutbeck—was fixed at the sum of two years' rent for old tenants, and three years' rent for new tenants. The question of the fine was becoming a vexed one between lords and tenants; for many of the heads of smaller demesnes were trying to exact higher and what were called arbitrary gresssums from their tenants. The customary holders of Baisbrowne

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\* An earlier edition of Burke (1847) gives a fuller version. "Benson (originally of Baysbrowne 1546, and Hawkshead co. of Lancaster, now represented by Robert Benson of Parkside, co. of Westmorland, and Robert Benson of Lodge Lane, co. of Lancaster, Esq.)" And it may be that the right to carry a coat of arms was procured by some descendant of the first freeholder John, who certified his claim by the above particulars. It is interesting to notice that the date (1546) coincides almost with the time of the close of the first lease of the lands of Conishead Priory, after its suppression (*West's Antiquities of Furness*); and John Benson may very well have purchased this portion of them then. Of the various coats set down in Burke to the name of Benson, one other at least was in use in these parts. Mr. Geo. Browne, who has gone into this confusing matter, finds that Thomas Benson, Land Tax Commissioner for the county of Westmorland in 1717, sealed with the one described as "Ar. on a chevron between three Goats' Heads erased sable three escallops of the field." This appears on the paten given to Grasmere Church by Mrs. Dorothy Benson (see later), as does the coat "On a chevron three cross crosslets" upon her cup, and the Baisbrowne three trefoils on her alms-dish. A variation on this last is found on a tablet in Hawkshead Church to the memory of John and Mary Benson, of Beetham (1771 and 1781) where two bendlets take the place of a bend (Mr. H. S. Cowper's *Monumental Inscriptions*). The Bensons of Skelwith Fold, commemorated on a Hawkshead tombstone by the strange prefix "Mr." as late as 1819, may have represented the Hawkshead branch of the family mentioned in Burke. In the palmy Elizabethan days of the family, several of them were seated on the Lancashire side of the Brathay valley, as at Skelwith, and higher at Stang End.

or Little Langdale thought it well to lose no time in striking a bargain with their young lord, and in obtaining from him a confirmation of their ancient customs. At the head of these was Michael Benson, clothier, of Loughrigg (and almost certainly of Coat-how) who must have held some land in Elterwater or Baisbrowne. In the deed prepared between the tenants and their lord John in 1571,\* not only was the fine fixed at two years' rental, for any change, but certain bargains about timber were written out. This deed, however, was never signed; and when in the following year another was drawn up, the names of Michael Benson and of John Benson of Elterwater had disappeared, and John Mealfell took their place, as representative for his fellows with their lord. The quaintly-worded parchment declares John Mealfell to be possessed of a messuage or tenement with appurtenances situated at "Baybrowne," rent 25s. 7d., which he holds "accordynge to Thannciannte and laudable custome of the countrie called Tenand rryghte commonlye used within the baronye of Kendall," from John Benson of Langdale, gentleman, as lord. And as "certayne debaits and variannce before this time hathe happenyed and growne" between the two concerning the fine to be paid, this variance has now been settled "by sundry frendes"; and it is agreed that John Mealfell with all other holders by tenant right "within Elterwater, Baybrowne, or Ackhowe" shall pay in future, as they have always paid, "withoute memorie of man" to their lord "onlie the dowble rente and no more for and on the name of a grissume or ffyne." In consideration of a certain sum of money paid before the sealing of the document, John Benson solemnly undertakes to carry out these provisions. The document is signed by himself and nine or ten tenants.

There had been grievous quarrel apparently between lord John and his relative Michael, for a document of

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\* See Appendix I.

1577, which gives the astonishing intelligence of John's sale of his entire manor, binds over the purchaser in the sum of £520 not to re-sell to Michael Benson, clothier, of Loughrigg. (See Appendix II.) The purchaser was James Brathwaite, of Ambleside, and a connection by marriage of the Bensons.

The family of Brathwaites, of Ambleside Hall, had likewise risen on the great wave of the woollen trade,\* and its members were intermarrying with other rich trading families, and acquiring freeholds and coats of arms. Fresh light is thrown on their progress by a recently copied document in the Record Office,† which gives a very full account of the tenants of "Amelsett" for the year 1505-6. From this we learn that five holdings (or tenements), all of which were of a size allowing five cattle to pasture on the common, had recently passed from other men into the hands of Brathwaites. Besides which, the wife of Thomas "Brathwayte" was paying a high rent for a holding of fifteen cattle, which marked it out from all other tenements except the ancient large one of "Master Forster Place." In this we may doubtless distinguish the later Ambleside Hall; and that the family was engaged in business is shown by the fact that two Brathwaites were at that time employed in the fulling trade, Robert having a walk-mill of his own.

The first member, however, to be distinguished by mention in county history was a Robert, who lived in the reign of Henry VIII., and he seems to have himself married, in the person of Alice, daughter of John Williamson of Milnbeck, Under-Skiddaw, into a fuller's family. Of his children, the eldest Thomas (knighted) married Dorothy Bindlose, daughter of the rich Robert Bindlose, merchant, of Helsington by Kendal, and with her he acquired property in Burneside, which became, along with Warcop, the seats of his branch of the family. James, the second

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\* See "Ambleside Town and Chapel." These *Transactions*, N.S., vi.

† Ministers' Account. Henry VII. 877.

son, remained with the business in Ambleside, and married Jane, daughter of Barnard Benson of Loughrigg; and Elizabeth, his sister, married George Benson of Hugill Hall, who died in 1573 without male heirs.\* There may be mentioned here, among the inter-marriages, that of Robert Bindlose's other daughter Agnes, in 1574, to William Fleming, Esq., of Coniston and Rydal; as well as the more pertinent and hitherto unnoticed fact that this was her second marriage, and that the first was to a Benson, whose Christian name and seat Sir Daniel Fleming apparently did not know when he recorded the same in the writings of his pedigree.† Agnes's son, Daniel Fleming (for whom she bought Skirwith Hall), married Isabel, daughter of James Brathwaite of Ambleside.

James, remaining at the ancestral home and mill, which were situated on the right bank of the Stock in the parish of Grasmere, aspired also to freehold, as his purchase of Baisbrowne shows. There was little need for the careful provision of the seller that he should not pass it on to his wife's brother-in-law, Michael Benson. When he died in 1583 his son Thomas was a minor, and it was not until 1597 that the latter obtained the livery of his father's freeholds from the Crown, which included the manor of Baisbrowne and twenty-three messuages or tenements in "Baysbrowne, Elterwater, and Ackhowe."‡

The extent of the manor was clearly greater then than now, and it is difficult to reconstruct it, or to account for the twenty-three farmholds which it contained. At present its boundaries enclose only one half of Ling Moor (the rocky mass rising between the Great and Little Langdale becks), and the farmstead of Baisbrowne, with the adjacent cottage called Oak How; while a few isolated

\* Communicated by Mr. J. A. Martindale. The Bensons remained at Hugill, however. Mr. Browne finds in the Windermere register baptisms of Randall's children from 1610 to 1628; and a Thomas there acquired a portion of the advowson of Windermere in 1578.

† Rydal Hall MSS.

‡ The original document, signed by Lord Burghley, is in the possession of Mr. George Browne.

patches of ground lie outside. Certainly in the time of the Bensons it included Elterwater Hall; and round about the hall, with its corn-mill, may have clustered some of those thirteen homesteads which John Benson enumerated in his will, and seven of which were occupied by men of his family. If so, they vanished when the evil days came, as did so many other homesteads. Some, however, may have been scattered widely abroad, for a messuage in Clappergate paid a rent to the manor in 1698 of 9s. 3d., and this portion (which suggests the possession of a wharf on the Brathay for the transference of goods by the lake) is now represented by a field.

The manor of Baisbrowne was, indeed, clearly created from the freehold possessed by the priory of Conishead at Elterwater, with accretions bought in by the rich Bensons after they obtained possession of it. It probably never embraced the whole of the triangle between the two meeting streams. Lord Muncaster still claims the manor of Little Langdale, for which his ancestor paid free service to the barony of Kendal at the end of the thirteenth century. One part of the Hacket Forge has continued in the hands of the Penningtons from early times, while another part was acquired as recently as 1872.\* Yet the forge was worked by Gawen Brathwaite, as will be shown; and he seems to have had an hereditary interest in it, since he speaks of having added to that interest by a purchase of his own.

This inheritance was not long enjoyed by Thomas Brathwaite. That he was a man of great ability and of some ambition is shown by his actions. He had money transactions with several Bensons, and a lawsuit with two of them. He sat on public commissions, and on boards of arbitration. He procured a coat-of-arms (different from his uncle's of Warcop), and collected coins and antiquities from the Roman camp at Ambleside. The record of his death, looked for in vain in the Grasmere

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\* Kindly communicated by Mr. Watt.

register, has recently been found in an excerpt taken from it by Sir Daniel Fleming, which shows that he was buried on December 1st, 1607. He was succeeded by his brother Gawen, who lived a long and prosperous life at Ambleside, occupied by his many affairs, both of land and business.

Gawen's will, dated January 14th, 16 $\frac{53}{54}$ , gives us several interesting particulars of these affairs. All his lands, freehold and customary, in Yorkshire, Westmorland, and Lancashire he leaves to his eldest son Thomas and his heirs; and, failing them, to his next surviving son, Robert, and his heirs. He leaves to them jointly his interest and his property in several iron foundries, and as one of these is in our district, at Hacket Forge, where an old smelting-hearth has been found, it may be well to quote the clause entire. This forge may have been established by the religious men of Conishead Priory. That they were interested in the smelting of iron we know from the fact that William de Lancaster gave them all the requisities for a bloomery in Furness, with ore from the mine and dead wood in Blawith for charcoal. If they made a compact with the Penningtons, who owned an adjacent freehold, to share at a furnace which should supply their estates with iron implements, as well as at a corn mill to be used jointly by their tenants, we should have an explanation of the "moieties" which turn up in connection with both.

The clause runs :—

Item I giue and bequeath unto my Two Sonnes Thomas and Robert their heires and assignes all that my Tenem<sup>t</sup> and Forge att the Hackert, and alsoe all my Tytle right and Interrest in the Finery hearth and Forge att Consey and all my Coale-howses Tooles and implem<sup>ts</sup> v<sup>sd</sup> Pvided or belonging to the said Hackert Forge and Finery Hearth att Consey or either of them, Together with all my Stocke of Woode Coales and Vre\* alreadie Pvided or w<sup>ch</sup> is bought or contracted for and towards the Mannageinge of the said Iron-workes. As also my Woodes att Parkamore, all w<sup>ch</sup> I give and bequeath to my said Two Sonnes their heires and assignes for and

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\* *V* and *U* were often used for each other. *Ure* is an old pronounciation of ore.

towards the payment and discharge of all my Debts, and the Pformeinge and payinge of the Legacies herein given and bequeathed. And after all my Debts and Legacies satisfied and paid out of the said Forges Stocke and other my Psonall Estate, Then my minde and Will is and I giue and Bequeath vnto my Sonne Thomas and his heires the One Moytie of the said Tenem<sup>t</sup> and Forge att the Hackert, as alsoe the moytie of all my Title and Interest in the said Fynerie hearth and Forge att Consey with the Moytie of all my Coale houses Tooles and Implements vsed Pvided or belonginge to the said Forge and Fynery hearth soe farr as my right and parte will Extende unto. And likewise I give and bequeath to my Sonne Robert Brathwaite his heires and assignes the other Moytie of the foresaid Fynery hearth att Consey with the other Moytie of the Coalhouses Tooles Implem<sup>ts</sup> & Apptennces belonginge vnto my part of the said Forge. And for the other Moytie of the said Hackert Forge and Tenem<sup>t</sup> w<sup>ch</sup> I bought of M<sup>r</sup> Wright for my said sonne Robert, Together with the other Moytie of all the Coalhouses Tooles Implem<sup>ts</sup> & Apptennces therevnto belonginge I doe hereby after my Debts and Legacies satisfied & paid as afforesaid, give ratife and Confirme the same vnto my said Sonne Robert and his heires for Ever.

The following clause, which sounds confusing at first, shows that Gawen had bought the Hugill property purposely for his son Robert, as well as the customary holding of Baisbrowne, which is a farm within the manor of the name :—

Item I giue ratife and Confirme vnto my sonne Robert and his heires all those Landes and Tenem<sup>ts</sup> w<sup>ch</sup> I formerlie bought for him att Hugall and Baysebrowne payinge the Ancient and Accustomed rente and services for the same, Alsoe I give unto him a Lease of my Moytie of the Milne att Elterwater for Thirty one yeares.

Gawen had farmed the little estate of Baisbrowne within his manor, and the inventory made out at his death\* shows a large farm stock there, which was valued at £157 os. 8d. He left to his manager, or "hinde" there, a legacy of £1, and 10s. each to the herd's wife and mother-in-law. His son Robert continued to farm it, as we learn from a widely different source.

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\* See "Ambleside Town and Chapel," (these *Transactions*, vol. vi., n.s., p. 1).

The Brathwaites of Ambleside seem to have been Parliamentary in their sympathies during the Civil Wars, and in religion they favoured the Presbyterians. Thomas, now the head of the family, was, when the new scheme of church government was framed, appointed one of the four elders of the parish of Grasmere in 1645.\* Robert refused to pay the tithes due from him for Baisbrowne, and persisted in his refusal at the restoration of the old order, when king and ejected vicar alike came into office again. Accordingly, a Bill of Exch<sup>è</sup>quer was drafted, which placed Robert's name at the head of a list of fifteen parishioners who all refused to pay, and which included five Bensons—Michael, William, James, Anthony, and Francis—and proceedings against them were opened.† At the depositions taken at Ambleside, however, in 1663,‡ only the four most prominent and wealthy among them were cited—viz., Robert Brathwaite, Christopher Nicholson, Francis Benson, and John Benson. One George Benson of Langdale, aged 96, was a witness, and Robert Shacklocke of Elterwater, who declared that “Gawen Brathwaite esq. dec<sup>d</sup> was owner of the messuage &c. called Baisbrowne, and stocked it with his own goods till his death about 9 years since, when the defendant Robert Brathwaite his son became the occupier.” Thomas Borrwicke deposed that the tenement was now let to him for three years. Edward Benson of Loughrigg, yeoman, aged 36, stated that he and two others had taken a lease of the tithes from the rector, the Rev. John Ambrose.

The claim made by the church on the little estate of Baisbrowne was a large one, and that it was an arbitrary one is shown by the fact that it is practically the same (with variations only in wording) as that made on the other estates. The items are given fully in Francis Benson's case (see later), but it may be noticed that the

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\* Dealt with in forthcoming “Church in Grasmere.”

† Ex. B. and A., Charles II., Westmorland, 4.

‡ Ex. Deps., 15 Charles II., Mich. 33, Westmorland.

demand made on sheep was upon a flock of 300, whereas Gawen's flock at Baisbrowne had numbered 173 at his death. The claim was, moreover, aggravated by the fact that arrears were demanded for fourteen years past. This, multiplying the annual tithe of £8 19s. 10d., made the total figure £129 18s.—an enormous one, reckoning the value of money in those days. How the matter was settled is not known.

Gawen Brathwaite, though his sons and daughters were so many that he had to make an "out-cast in the wall" of Ambleside Chapel to seat them alongside himself, had no grandson of his name to follow him. When his eldest son Thomas died without heirs in 1674, the lordship of Baisbrowne passed to his fourth son Robert and his heirs. Thomas's will bequeaths it as "all that my manor or lordship of Baisbrowne and all the rents services and appurtenances thereunto belonging as also my rents and services of my tenants of the lands called Gilpin's Lands in Langdall."\* When Robert died it passed to his daughter Dorothy. Her marriage with Miles Atkinson must have been a poor one. Miles was a man who could not sign his name, and he was soon in money difficulties, for we find him (on his mother-in-law, Mrs. Bridget, consenting to a mortgage on High House, Hugill), securing to her an annuity of £10 out of the "mannor or lordship of Baisbrowne." Soon again he was selling lands outright at Hugill. On the death of his wife he charged a fine to the tenants of Baisbrowne of double the amount stipulated by some of them in the preceding century, as the following receipt shows:—

May y<sup>e</sup> 3<sup>d</sup> 1693 Then Reseved of Robert Partridge y<sup>e</sup> sum' of forty shillings in full for a gen<sup>r</sup>all fyne being a fyne sertaine due unto me upon y<sup>e</sup> death of Dorothy my Late wife for a messuage & Tenem<sup>t</sup> att Clappersgate of y<sup>e</sup> yearly Rent of nine shillings & threepence for which s<sup>d</sup> sum' of forty shillings I admitt him Tenant of y<sup>e</sup> s<sup>d</sup> Messuage and Tenem<sup>t</sup> according to Custome as Witness my hand. Myles Atkinson [mark].

\* *The Boke of Kirkby Kendall.*

Miles paid a free rent of 19s. 3d. to the Crown for the manor in 1695, as Gawen Brathwaite had done in 1636. He died in 1698. His will directed the sale of all his remaining property (except Baisbrowne, which passed to his eldest son), and this included, besides High House, "all that my Customary Messuage and Tenement and Parcells of ground with th' appurtenances, situate Lying and being in great Langdale," which was not freehold, but paid a rent of 2s. to the Richmond fee. From the proceeds, four-score pounds each was to be kept in trust for Dorothy's other children, Thomas and Bridget, and the rest went to his second wife and her babies. His first family was still young, and Thomas, the younger boy, was placed at the Ambleside school,\* and ultimately proceeded to college and procured his B.A. degree. The eldest, Robert, who inherited Baisbrowne, was of modest ambitions, for by his own desire he was apprenticed in 1699 to a sadler at Clappersgate; but in two years time the indenture was cancelled.† He gave a release to his father's executors on coming of age in 1704, and probably established himself at Baisbrowne to farm his property. The will of Robert Hawkrigge of Oak How in 1726 states that the holding is "of the Lands of Robert Atkinson of Baysbrown, gentleman, and pays a lord's rent of 15s. 9½d." Robert's son, Braithwaite Atkinson, "of Great Langdale," who married Jane Green in 1729, must have been an excellent agriculturist, for in 1748 we find Mr. Knott of Rydal writing to Sir William Fleming that if he cannot come over himself to the sale of sheep, "Mr. Cumpstone will do His best, [though] Brathwaite Atkinson of Bayesbrown is a much better Judge." In 1751 Brathwaite appeared in the list of Langdale freeholders as "of Carlisle." He was succeeded by John "of Baysbrowne," the baptism of whose sons, Thomas and

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\* See "Ambleside Town and Chapel."

† For most of these particulars I am indebted to Mr. George Browne, whose ancestor Benjamin was one of the guardians of the boys.

Braithwaite, in 1780 and 1783, as well as his own death in 1790, are recorded in the Grasmere register. Green in 1810, when locating his "Sixty Etchings," says "Bays Brown is a farm house, and the capital of a little manor, of which Mr. Atkinson is the lord." In 1829 John Atkinson, living at Cockermouth, was the owner, and the *Cumberland and Westmorland Directory* describes the manor as "containing Lingmoor Fell, and two extensive blue-slate quarries." It was sold probably by him to Mr. Benson Harrison of Ambleside, whose descendant, Miss Muriel Harrison, is now in possession of it.

The house, lying under the bleak fell of Lingmoor and cut off from the valley by the Great Langdale Beck, which runs over the low pastures in times of flood, has nothing to distinguish it from the usual old farmstead of ample type. What ornament it possessed in oak panelling and carving has been taken away, and the parlour mantle-piece is said to have been placed in a modern home of the Harrisons. One little room is called "the lord's study." The damp floors of the house and its low ceilings, give an impression of forlornness that its lonely position accentuates. Yet about it and the still lonelier cot of Oak How there are signs, in roads and ruined walls, of the life and prosperity that once filled this remotest nook in the mountains, and are now vanished.

*Elterwater Hall.*—The connection between the Braithwaites and the Bensons of Elterwater was in Gawen's time of a friendly character. In his will he charged his lands at Parkamore with an annuity of £9 to be paid to Michael Benson, the elder, of Elterwater during his life. This Michael was probably he who had, along with his mother in 1605, secured their holding at Elterwater by making over "Gilpin's Lands" to Thomas Braithwaite. And he may have been the son of John of Elterwater, whose death is registered in 1599. He died in 1670.

And next we find Gawen's two sons, Thomas and Robert (who neither of them had sons), parting with a

portion of the Langdale freehold acquired by their grandfather from John Benson to a Benson, who was possibly his descendant. In 1669 they executed a deed granting to Michael Benson of Elterwater, the younger, for the sum of £100, the freehold of the customary messuage or tenement in his holding which he had inherited, known as Elterwater Hall. Along with this went one half-share in a corn mill on the same premises now in decay, and a close called Little Parke, as well as all the closes, pastures, meadows, &c., called Millbeck, situated in the township of Langdale. For these they agreed to furnish Michael with an inheritance "in fee simple," provided he paid a yearly rent of 20s. and suit of Court at the Court Baron of Thomas Brathwaite and his heirs when such was kept for the manor of Baisbrowne, with a stipulation on Michael's side that he should not be required to travel more than ten miles to pay the same.\*

Thus the Bensons gained again a freehold in Langdale, though on a much smaller scale than their former one. We find Michael of Elterwater executing a bond in 1671 with Thomas Benson "de Kirkby Kendal, Barber chirurgen," and also holding bonds of the two Francis Bensons, senior and junior, of the Fold, and of Thomas Benson of Coat How. He died at the age of 60 in 1672, the year in which his wife Jane, described as "de Langdall," was buried beneath the floor of Grasmere Church. The freehold continued in his family till at least the middle of the eighteenth century. About that time John of Elterwater Hall granted to his son and heir, John, the closes and pastures in Langdale called Broad Hows, Ash Lea garth, Wallthwaite wood, and Holme field, which were not freehold, but paid to the Marquis fee a rent of 5s. John appears as a freeholder for Langdale in the official list of 1751, along with the owner of Baisbrowne.

*The Fould.*—The Fould, a customary holding of the

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\* Mr. G. Browne's MSS.

Bensons in Loughrigg from the earliest record of it by name, remained a stronghold of their family till the end of the eighteenth century.

Nicolson and Burn make mention of it as a freehold in their history:—

There is a place in Loughrig called Fold-house, which is freehold, and heretofore belonged to the family of *Benson*. The last of which name, *Bernard Benson*, married a daughter of Gilpin of Kentmere, and had four daughters co-heirs; of whom, one was married to judge Hutton, another to James Brathwaite of Ambleside esquire, a third to Mr. Davies of Winder in the parish of Boston, and the fourth to Mr. Michael Benson of Coat-how.

This dateless paragraph has been a source of confusion to many who have sought information as to the baffling family of Bensons. The Bernard in question, far from being the last of his name at the Fould, must have been he who held it before the freehold was obtained. The James Brathwaite of Ambleside, who is elsewhere stated to have married Jane, daughter of Bernard Benson "of Loughrigg,"\* died in 1583, being the only member of that family who bore the name of James; and Michael of Coat How, who purchased a great deal of freehold in 1575 and is always described as clothier, was the last of the name of Michael at Coat How, and therefore it must have been he who married the daughter and co-heiress of Bernard.

In fact, Nicolson and Burn's Bernard fits in extremely well with the Bernard whose widow Elizabeth was in possession of the Fould in 1575;† and he, almost certainly, was the brother Barnard of Loughrigg to whom John Benson, the freeholder of Little Langdale, entrusted by will the whole care of his property, but who was dead before the codicil to the same was written in 1563. As the Bensons worked in partnership always, Barnard may

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\* St. George's Heraldic Visitation of Westmorland, 1615.

† Deed of the divisions of the freeholds at Rydal Hall.

well have been a rich man like his brother, and his daughters reckoned as heiresses. His widow "Elsobeth" was buried in 1577, two years after the freehold of her large freehold (along with the smaller ones at the Fould held by the widows of Robert and Thomas) had been acquired by her wealthy son-in-law, Michael of Coat How.

To which member of the family the "capital message" at the Fould was now transferred, in the absence of male heirs to Barnard, is not apparent; but a Francis becomes prominent in the church register and elsewhere from the year 1638 onwards. He was a man of pronounced character, who eagerly followed new channels of political and religious thought. When the Presbyterians framed their scheme of church government in 1645, he was chosen one of the four elders of the parish, standing apparently for the township of Rydal and Loughrigg, as Mr. Thomas Brathwaite did for Ambleside, Michael Benson (doubtless of Elterwater) for Langdale, and Michael Knott for Grasmere. On George Fox's appearance in the countryside (which was in 1653) he became his adherent, gave him hospitality even after Fox was a marked man, and warmly embraced the tenets of the Friends. We meet with his name constantly after the Restoration in tax-papers and churchwardens' presentments as refusing to pay his church dues. In the Subsidy Roll of 1661, he and his wife Dorothy are taxed 1s. 4d. each as non-communicants. So also is Barnard Benson of Loughrigg and John Benson, with Mary his wife, of Langdale, who must likewise have joined the Friends. Francis naturally was among the number who refused to pay tithes. The church assesses his possessions in the following terms, the demand being exactly that made upon Mr. Robert Brathwaite, John Benson, and Michael Benson, and only upon wealth in husbandry, not in trade or mills:—

Francis Benson did possesse & occupy within y<sup>e</sup> Rectory of Grasmere & County of Westm'ld' for 14 yeares last past div'se meadowes y<sup>e</sup> customary paym<sup>t</sup> for the tith hay whereof in ev'y of the said yeares was 10<sup>d</sup> Alsoe had in each yeare 10 cowes y<sup>e</sup> Customary paym<sup>t</sup> for ev'y cowes milke in ev'y of the said yeares was 2<sup>d</sup> Alsoe had one tyth Calfe in evry yeare the paym<sup>t</sup> whereof was yearly 1<sup>s</sup> 8<sup>d</sup> Alsoe had in every said yeare 2 foales the customary paym<sup>t</sup> for the same was in every yeare 2<sup>d</sup> apeice And alsoe had 300 sheepe & 100 lambs fallen in every of y<sup>e</sup> said yeares the tyth wool whereof was yearly worth 40<sup>s</sup> And 1<sup>s</sup> 2 A customary paym<sup>t</sup> for ev'y of y<sup>e</sup> said tyth lambes And also dureinge the said time kept 3 sowes the tyth of the piggs in each yeare was ten pence And alsoe kept & had dureinge the said time 10 geese ten hens & 10 duckes y<sup>e</sup> tyth of the profitts whereof was yearly worth 5<sup>s</sup> And alsoe had in each of the said yeares 2 swarmes of bees the customary paym<sup>t</sup> for the same was yearly 2<sup>d</sup> apeice And alsoe had dureinge the said time 10 bushells of Aples 10 bushells of peares & 10 bushells of plumbes w<sup>th</sup> div'se qualities of other fruites in each of y<sup>e</sup> said yeares the tyth whereof was yearly worth 3<sup>s</sup> And did alsoe depasture 2 acres of ground with drye & barren Catle y<sup>e</sup> tyth whereof was worth in each of the said yeares 5<sup>s</sup> And alsoe had groweing hempe y<sup>e</sup> tyth wherof was worth 2<sup>s</sup> yearly And alsoe is oveinge 2-6 in ev'y yeare for oblac'one w<sup>th</sup> div'se other dues.

A note in Sir Daniel Fleming's handwriting among the Rydal Hall papers shows that the proceedings of the Friends were soon watched and reported:—

Nov. 1. 63. there then mett at y<sup>e</sup> house of Jno. Benson at Stangend in Lancashire these Quakers following

Westmorland people

Francis Benson, Bernard his son, Regnhold Holme, Michael Wilson, Barbara Benson.

Lancashire people

Gyles Walker, wright, near Hauxside, William Wilson y<sup>e</sup> speaker, & his wife.

These James Russell gave me in y<sup>e</sup> names of Nov. 5. 63.

Thus the first illicit meetings were held in remote homesteads, and the Westmorland Friends slipped over the border at Little Langdale ford to join those of Lancashire.

The family of Francis remained staunch Friends, and obstinate in their refusal to pay church rates. Francis's death is recorded in the registers of that body as of "Fould in Loughrig" for February of the year 167 $\frac{2}{3}$ , his wife Dorothy having died in 1669.\* His successor Francis, who likewise had a wife Dorothy, appears in the Subsidy Rolls of 1675 as paying for her and himself the non-communicants tax of 1s. 4d.; as do Reynald Holme and his wife Jane; and a John Benson in Langdale—where the Quakers were then most numerous.

This Francis, spoken of as junior in his father's lifetime, died according to the Friends' register, in January, 171 $\frac{4}{5}$ , and a third Francis, grandson of the first (whose wife Beatrix "of Fold" died in 1733) seemingly followed him. The churchwardens cite a Francis of Fold as failing to pay rates on his property there and in Grasmere in their presentments of 1705, 1706, 1707, 1712 and 1717. Again the name appears in 1727, but only as "a Quaker," and in 1728 and 1732, when a Bernard is also added. As the third Francis's death is not recorded in the Registers of Kendal, it is possible that he left the home of his forefathers; and the death of a Bernard, son of Francis, of London, is recorded for 1775.

The main stock of Fould Bensons was failing; nor is it easy to trace the subsidiary householders of the name there. At the close of the seventeenth century a Thomas, an Arthur, and a George are all represented in the church register. In 1765 both an Edward and a Leonard had children baptized there.

By this time trade and all attendant wealth had departed from this hollow of the fells; and the once proud race of clothiers and freeholders clung as simple husbandmen to barren lands in a time of general decline and impoverishment. The freehold with its self-contained and busy hamlet had declined into a group of poor homesteads,

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\* For these dates I am indebted to Mr. Wilfrid Sessions.

that were presently let to shoemakers and "slate-rivers," and even paupers. In 1776 the township books give Gawen Langton as its owner. In 1792 it was advertised for sale at the Salutation Inn in Ambleside, along with High Close. The printed sheet described them as two estates, consisting of four dwelling-houses, out-houses, over 160 customary acres of farm land, and 60 acres of wood; and as being all freehold, except a part of High Close. With them went the seigniori, or lordship, of three customary holdings and tenements in Loughrigg, paying an annual lord's rent and arbitrary fines.

This accounts for seven houses in the two freeholds, four to be sold out and out, along with the lordship of three more. Of these seven, three at most exist now; and it is doubtful if the present cottage adjacent to Fold, called Crag Head, ever was a part of the freehold. The site of one vanished house which lay in Nutsdale, two fields off the Fold, is known.

The "capital message" of the freeholder too was swept away.\* It had become an encumbrance even when partitioned into two, and the new owner, who figures in the township books from 1797 as "George Law, Esq.," had no use for it. Green drew it, gaunt and neglected, and printed his sketch in his set of houses published 1822. It was soon to vanish. First its oak fittings were stripped and carried away to embellish modern houses; and then—further back than the memory of the aged thereabout can reach—it was pulled down. An ancient cottage that stood at right angles with it was demolished later; and nothing is now left of the once flourishing hamlet but one humble homestead, and low walls and two old yew trees. The old man whose forefathers have long dwelt hard by

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\* Its superiority over the ordinary statesman's dwelling is shown by Francis having paid in 1663 or 1664 a tax on four hearths; Edward Benson of High Close paying only on two, and George of High Close on the usual one. In 1665, however, Francis declared no more than three, but on inspection was charged on two more "fraudelently stopt up," which meant that they had been hastily closed in view of the inspector's visit. In 1727 Francis Benson paid a tax on nine windows.



*Herbert Bell, photo.*

LOUGHRIGG FOLD.  
BY WILLIAM GREEN, 1822.

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has a tale to tell, not only of the former "smidy," but of a Baptist meeting-house that once stood here, and he will even point out the spot where the "dipping" place was. But this is hard to understand; and may be a myth that has arisen from the nonconforming strain of the freehold Bensons of the Fould.

*High Close.*—Before leaving this quarter of Loughrigg, something must be said about the neighbouring High Close, which came to the hammer with the Fould, but of which much less evidence is available. It was long the home of wealthy Bensons, and it was, as we have seen, the most part of it a freehold. It is extremely likely that it figures in the 1575 purchase of freehold as the large tenement (rent 15s. 4d.) then held by Mabel Benson, widow, and John Benson; and which was taken over by Edward, clothier, as his share of the purchase. From that time the name Edward constantly appears as representative of the chief family at High Close, as does that of Francis at the Fould, and Thomas at Coat How; though that there was a subsidiary family here also is shown by tax-papers and by the church register, which gives the baptisms of children of an Oliver and a James in the beginning of the seventeenth century, and of a Thomas towards the close. The first Edward we know of, the new freeholder "of the Hei close," had a large family, the first recorded birth being that of George in 1575. Edward is expressly termed "clothier" in the freehold deed, but we have no evidence of a mill there; while there is indirect evidence of trade of another kind.

High Close stands on the crest of the pass between the Rothay and the Brathay valleys, where they converge, yet are still separated by the mass of Loughrigg. The modern tourist, gaining its vantage ground on the solitary road, and surveying the glorious prospect spread out far away and below it, would hardly suppose this to be a likely place for a shop. Yet such, if we read the Subsidy

Rolls of the Stuart times aright, it was; and Edward Benson a successful store or shop keeper.\*

The old Subsidy imposed a tax on all moveable goods (including merchandise) as well as on land; though both classes of property were exempt that did not reach a certain value. Also the inhabitants of the northern counties were frequently excused from the tax on goods, because of their liability to depredations of the Scotch.† For this reason, or because their chattels were few, the statesmen and small freeholders of these parts managed to escape or evade the tax. The rolls show only, for each township (besides the non-communicants tax) the names of the principal landowners, and of one other man—or occasionally two, if the township was scattered as Langdale—who was apparently the store keeper, and who could not therefore bring his moveable goods below the fixed value.

The shop indeed was from early times an accredited feature of the manor, as were the fulling-mill and the brewery; and we hear of one shop in Grasmere paying a rent to the lord of 2d. in 1493-4.‡ In the Subsidy Roll of 1625, we find, in the three townships of Grasmere, John Knott taxed in Grasmere proper on £4 worth of goods; in Langdale, Charles Middelfell senior and Regnald Willis “de Steele end” respectively on £3 worth; and in Rydal and Loughrigge, Edward Benson “de high close,” on £3 worth, for which he paid 8s. od. This is repeated in the subsidy of the second year of Charles I.; while in that of 1641 George Benson takes the place of Edward as tax-payer, paying on goods valued at £4, the sum of £1 1s. 4d. By 1661 however, the Bensons had lost their monopoly in the township as storekeepers, and it had passed to Reginald Brathwaite of Clappersgate.

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\* Of the subsidies, only a few are represented by rolls among the Rydal Hall MSS.

† See *History of Taxes*, by Stephen Dowell.

‡ Rental of Richmond fee, Sizergh Castle.

In 1653 Edward "of the hie Close" bought a tenement for £29, rent 1s. 8d., called Milbeck, in Great Langdale, which was stated in the deed to be "of the inheritance of the said Edward gentleman," as well as in his occupation.\* No doubt this was the corn-mill for the valley, which would be a considerable source of wealth to the holder; and in which (or in lands belonging to it) the Bensons of Elterwater seem to have had some share (see *ante*). From this time the family at High Close are found in close connection with this property; and the "Benson Estate" at Milbeck was represented in the church by wardens of the name in 1790, 1811, and in 1833, when an Edward closed the record.

It was on returning from the mill on a July day of 1662, in company with his neighbour William Harrison of Ellers, and discussing the mysterious death of Dixon of Middlefell-place, who had been found dead on the fells the previous April, that Edward Benson heard the astounding statement from his companion, "We killed him," upon which he felt bound to act.†

This branch of the family remained apparently well-to-do; though Edward is found repaying Squire Daniel Fleming a borrowed £20 10s. od. in 1674. An Edward who in 1747 was admitted tenant at the Court of the Richmond fee, of that portion of his father Edward's estate at High Close that was not freehold, in 1754 gave £6 13s. 4d. to the poor of Grasmere. The property may have been divided among relatives, and some of it sold, for while the "Benson estate" at Milbeck and the "Benson estate" at the High Close were represented in the township's books as late as 1813-14, the principal part of the latter had some time before passed to strangers. A certain Mr. John Langton, who owned also Coat-how,

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\* This means, apparently, that he secured the customary tenure of a house that had previously been in his freehold, as well as previously let to him by the customary holder.

† Rydal Hall Papers.

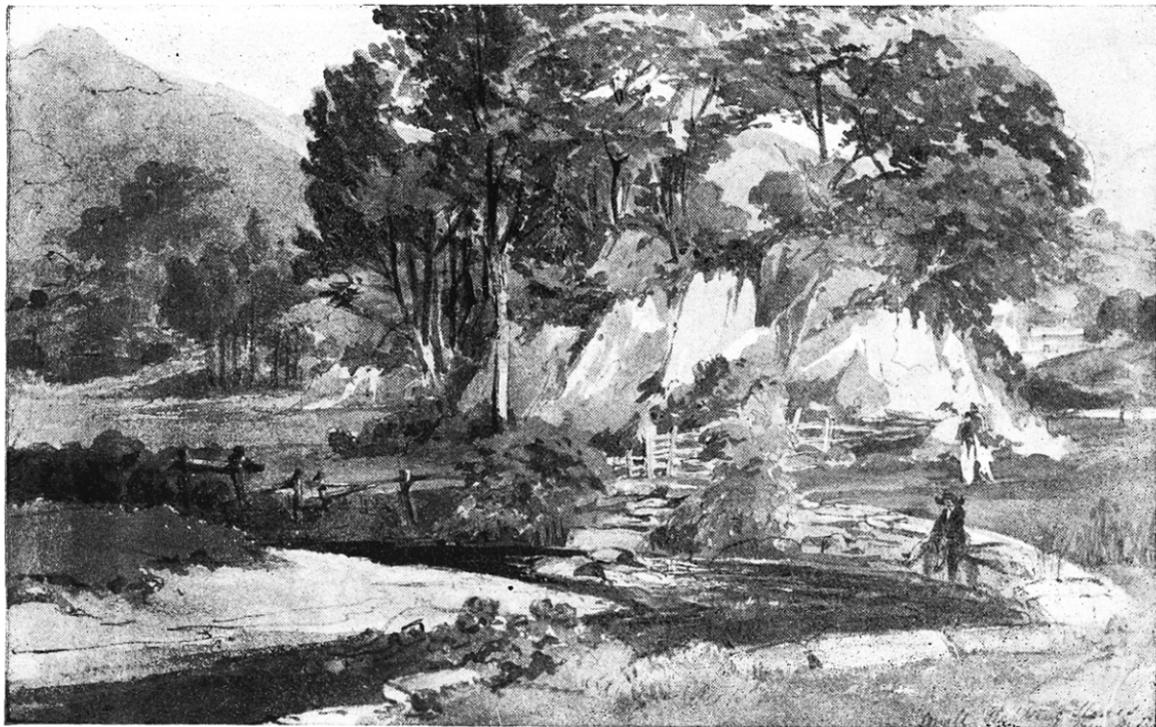
and probably Fould, possessed it in 1756;\* and when in 1784 Samuel Kenyon, the second husband of a Mrs. Langton, is found writing to Sir Michael le Fleming about the sale of Coat How, he remarks that he would have no objection to selling High Close likewise; though, from the fact that it was partly freehold, and partly customary, it would be difficult to fix a price; £2,000, however, might be suggested. Sir Michael did not buy it, and after the public sale before mentioned it passed, with the Fould, into the hands of George Low or Law. In 1833 it belonged to John Law Beetholme, and afterwards to Mr. James Greenwood, whose son sold it to Mr. Wheatley Balme in 1857. The house, unlike most of the freeholders' dwellings, survived the period of decadence, and has become by additions a beautiful residence in the centre of a fair estate.

*Miller Bridge.*—Under this name a good deal of ancient history lies buried. It has come to mean a house standing pleasantly on the slope of Loughrigg by the Rothay, and a stone footbridge hard by, that arches the river for the passengers who travel the field path from Ambleside. Now this bridge is a modern construction, which aged memory can reach beyond. Formerly a ford and a rough set of stepping stones crossed the water, while a smaller set (strangely known as the Little Miller) crossed Stock-beck on the same path. Both sets are mentioned by Green in his Guide, published 1819, and they are remembered by Mrs. Clay, the owner of Miller Bridge house. At the larger set a former owner of High Miller Bridge was drowned.

Yet there can be little doubt that once upon a time a miller cut his dam hereabouts, planted his wheel upon the race, and set up his plank or "stang" bridge, by which to cross it. And for that miller we must look earlier than Barnard Benson, clothier, of Miller Bridge, who lived in

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\* His name appears indeed in the official list of freeholders for the township, along with Sir William Fleming's, in 1754.



STEPPING STONES ON THE STOCK BECK NEAR MILLER BRIDGE :

*J. Harden, pinxit : Herbert Bell, photo.*

" THE LITTLE MILLER."

TO FACE P. 182.

Queen Elizabeth's time. There may have been here, originally, the manorial corn-mill spoken of in 1453,\* where the tenants of Loughrigg (who were not of the Rydal manor) might grind their corn. One plot of High Miller Bridge is called Kiln How; and a kiln almost always accompanied a mill, for the drying of malt; or it is possible that we have here the site of an ancient brewery. However, we know that by 1493 † there was no corn-mill in the little division of Loughrigg, and that folk on the Rothay side of it must have carried their grain into Ambleside or Rydal. On the other hand, it very early possessed a walk-mill, and the John Walker, who paid 3s. 4d. at the end of the fourteenth century to the lord of the Lindesey fee for the privilege, may have carried on his industry here. If so, the position would be maintained, for the increase of trade had caused the erection of two new walk-mills in Loughrigg by 1506, and in the same Fee.

But if we attempt to reconstruct mill and dam at this spot, we are baffled. The topography of the place is entirely changed; and neither river nor road takes its ancient course. The former made a wide sweep across the flat to the left, almost touching the modern church of Ambleside, and returned again near the back drive of Miller Bridge house. The curve, all the way from where the rill from Brow Head (Mossy Sike) falls into the main water, and where the Scandale and Stock becks pour into it their confluent streams on the other side, was a place of marshes, pools, and islands; and all of it was associated by name with the miller and his bridge. The flat ground within the river's ancient curve is still known as Miller Field. Brigg Holme Dub was a pool thereabouts bathed in by an Ambleside man still living.

And from Mossy Sike the road, which now hugs the artificial and built-up course of the river, formerly rose by a gentle slope through the present grounds of Loughrigg

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\* Ministers' Account. Bundle, 644. No. 10444.

† Rental at Sizergh Castle.

Brow—well above the marshy flat—to round the corner to Clappersgate. Below the road therefore, and not above it, lay the miller's precincts, which stretched to the edge of the curving river, and were thus enclosed between river and road. Besides the names on the flatter portion of this plot we have on the rising ground those of High Miller Bridge and Low Miller Bridge, as well as Housesteads beyond, which were used to differentiate the various homesteads that grew up upon it. The mill-stream doubtless ran below these houses, striking a straight line across the wide river-curve. If so, it was the swampy ditch remembered by Mrs. Clay as lying alongside the newly constructed road below the houses; and it may have suggested to Mr. Branker, the owner of Croft, Clappersgate, that canal-like "cut" by which he altered the entire course of the river for this length. This he did some time before 1840.\*

Real history begins however with Barnard Benson, clothier, who in 1575 is found to hold a messuage, tenement and farmhold called "Milner bridge" in Loughrigg, of the high lord's rent of 9s. od., which carried with it land and wood between the "watter off Rotha" and the hedge of Rydal demesne, called Dale (or Vale) briggstead and the Islands. This, as we have seen, was part of the great purchase of freehold in Loughrigg made by Barnard and his partners Michael and Edward. And Barnard took along with it the freehold of three other homesteads adjacent; namely, one called Cockstone, rent 2s. 4d., in the holding of Barnard himself and of Margaret Wilson, widow of Robert; another called Foxhowe, rent 3s. 5d., in the holding of Richard Robinson; a third also called Foxhowe, rent 9d., held by Willing Dickson, which carried with it an island that lay between Rotha and the

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\* See Dr. Arnold's Journal of this date, given in his Life. Mr. Branker came to Croft about 1827. Aged memory makes the "cut" about 1834. The Rothay has been further mauled in the writer's time, hereabouts; and the rocky ledge, over which the river broke and fell on the return from the curve, has been blasted away.

hedg of Rydal demesne.\* Of these Cockstone—subsequently known as Low Cockstone, to distinguish it from the Cockstone higher up the river, that belonged to the Richmond fee—can be traced to the present Loughrigg Holm; Foxhowe, long the home of the Robinsons, is the farm above Dr. Arnold's house; and the smaller house may be the vanished Kits Gill hard by; or the vanished Con Nest, higher up the slope.

It will be seen therefore that Barnard's acquisition of freehold embraced almost the whole bank of the Rothay from Loughrigg Holm to Clappersgate, with the exception of Fox Gill, Brow Head, and the plot upon which probably his own mill stood, and the homesteads called High and Low Miller Bridge; for these belonged, not to the lordship of Rydal, but to that of the Richmond fee, and were therefore unattainable in freehold.

Though the ubiquity of the names Miller and Brigg argues an early origin, Barnard's purchase certainly spread them. Beyond the central plot that lay between river and road (and which so strangely was divided in lordship) we find Miller Brow and Miller Hagg, while the homesteads of his freehold—even Cockstone—came later to be lumped together in rentals as Miller Bridge.

Barnard however did not succeed in founding a family at Miller Bridge. Beyond his purchase, nothing is known of him personally, except that he was concerned in the transfer of a moiety of the advowson of Windermere (formerly belonging to Charles Benson of Skelwith, merchant) to Thomas Benson of Hugill and James Brathwaite of Ambleside Hall. His bond, in the possession of Mr. George Browne, bears the date 1578. His residence was apparently on the plot called House-steads, where stood once a "capital messuage" which after the dispersion of his property remained (along with Great Field

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\* This is still occasionally an island. Hereabouts lay the great pool called Holm Dub, regularly fished by the lords of Rydal.

adjoining and a few portions probably held in his hand) a freehold.

A subsequent deed tells us that his son Francis lost or sold the whole of his little lordship, and that it passed into the hands of one Rowland Jackson, who sold it to Squire John Fleming of Rydal Hall. Thus in one generation was one portion of the Loughrigg freehold, that had been sold in 1575, regained by the Flemings. The customary holders of the farmsteads upon it attended Squire John's court in 1638, and (as he wrote on their papers of admission to his manor) "did attorne unto me." Housesteads seems to have been kept in the lord's hands. Rowland Jackson was apparently living there in 1629. Afterwards, Edward Harrison, nephew and agent of Squire John Fleming, died there. It was doubtless in his time that papers were carried thither from Rydal Hall. In 1654, when Sir Jordan Crosland (who married the eldest of John's daughters) gave evidence in court during the law suit that ensued with the next male heir of the Flemings, he stated "there are many old deeds and writings at Millerbrig, Co. Westmorland, w<sup>ch</sup> belonged to John Fleming," and he promised to search them for the evidence wanting.\* In the settlement of the disputed estates, it was decided that as the Miller Bridge freehold had been purchased by John, and not inherited by him, it passed to his daughters, while the inherited property passed to his cousin Daniel, son of William of Skirwith. We find it therefore next in possession of the daughters' husbands, Sir Jordan Crosland and George Collingwood, and they sold it 1667 to William Birkett of Troutbeck Park for £400. In the "Deed of Milner Bridge Tenement and 4 other Tenements in Loughrigg" † the various holdings comprised in it are enumerated, and it winds up with the close called

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\* Rydal Hall MSS.

† In the possession of Mr. George Browne.

Ellethow or Jenkinfield, and a parcel of meadow adjoining the Rothay "both which were sometime heretofore in the possession of one Francis Benson being purchased in Fee by Barnard Benson his Father dec<sup>d</sup> and since purchased by one Rowland Jackson who sold the same to John Flemin of Ridall, Esquire."

William Birkett no doubt bought as a speculation,\* and it is probable that he cleared away at least a portion of the clothier's now neglected homestead; for we find Squire Daniel Fleming buying from him slates for the great new barn he was erecting across the river in the Low Park of Rydal.

1673<sup>3</sup> Feb. Paid unto Williã Birket for slate had of him from Miller bridge to my new Corne Barne ... .. 01<sup>ii</sup> . 00<sup>s</sup> . 00<sup>d</sup>

Squire Daniel had always resented the sale of the Loughrigg freeholds by his great grandfather William, and he before long found opportunity (carefully watched for, no doubt) for securing the Miller Bridge portion of it, which now for the second time was regained by the owner of Rydal Manor as a fee.

1673. June 16. Paid unto my brother Williã Fleming for y<sup>e</sup> purchase of his Rent, Land, & estate at Miller-bridge, and all in Loughrigg ... .. 50<sup>ii</sup> . 00<sup>s</sup> . 00<sup>d</sup>

From that time the rents accruing, both customary and free, are found to be paid to him as lord, and amount to 7s. 9d. a year. House-steads being "free" paid 1d. and a peppercorn. How long a dwelling-house existed on it is not known. It passed through many hands, as did Low Miller Bridge; and when in 1669 William Mackereth of the Causey in Ambleside sold it for £12 to Robert Holme, it is called a part of that capital messuage and tenement "at the Milner Bridge, once belonging to Sir

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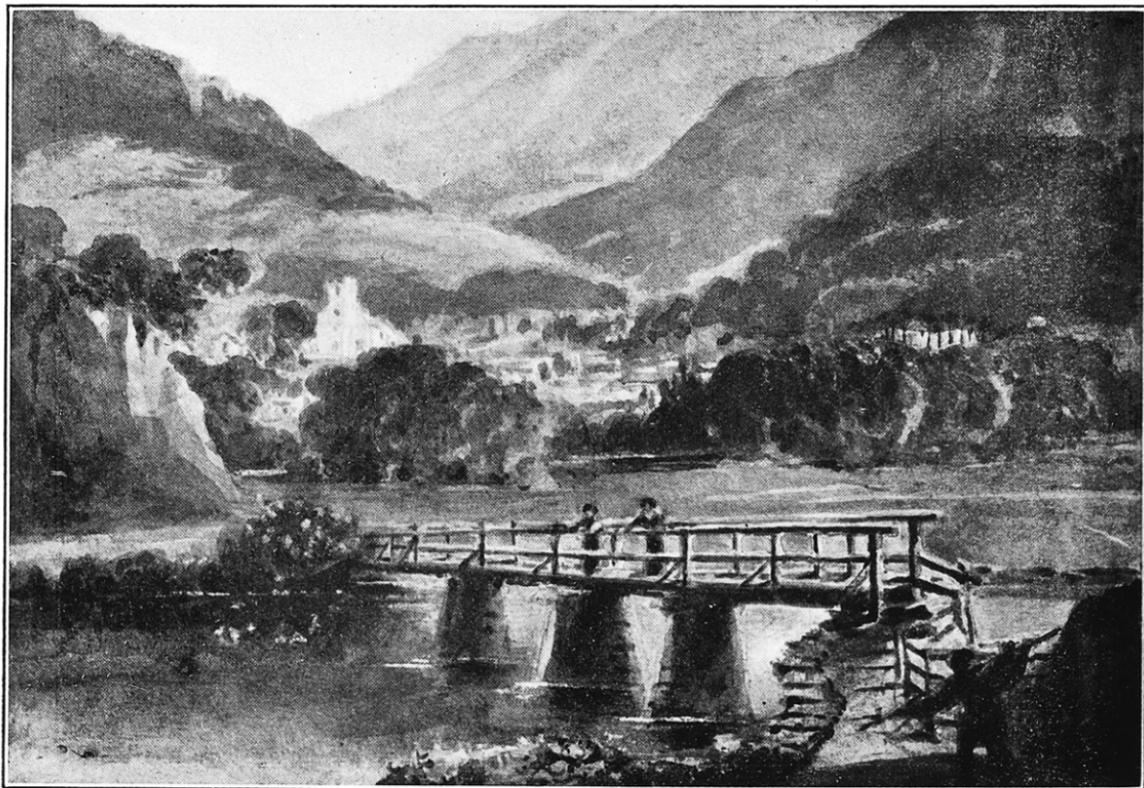
\* Rowland Jackson had apparently done the same, for Sir William Fleming, when allowing the transfer of Fox How in 1732, speaks of him, the "then Lord of Fox how," as having sold the woods upon it.

Jordan Crossland and George Collingwood, Esq., and lately in the tenure of Wil. Birkett of Troutbecke parke and purchased by William Mackereth from William Birkett." Later (in 1721) John Troughton of Pull sold it for £15 to Elizabeth Park, widow, and it is then stated that due and proper possession was given her "by the Delivery of the Hasp of the dwelling-house door and a clod of Earth and a Twigg of wood in the said Close in the name of Seisin and in Lieu of all the within granted p<sup>re</sup>misses."

Elizabeth in 1723 passed it on to James Winder for £42 10s.; and he sold it in 1759 to Mrs. Ann Myles, the widow of Jonathan the Ambleside curate, for £71. The son who inherited it, John Ellis Myles, who continued the free rent of 1d. to Rydal, died a bachelor in 1777; and his sister, Mrs. Hutton, sold it in 1814 to Mrs. Harden of Brathay Hall, who had already acquired Low Miller Bridge.

Both Low and High Miller Bridge, customary holdings of the Richmond fee, had meantime also fallen on evil days. During the eighteenth century they figure largely in the births and deaths of the Grasmere register; and as late as 1721 the family of Benson was represented there by a William. But by 1820 one solitary cottage stood at Low Miller Bridge, the sole relic of the once flourishing hamlet. Mr. Harden, son of the purchaser, built on to this cottage the house that is now known as Miller Bridge, and there his daughter still resides. House-steads is a vacant field, with traces of an old road crossing it, and a bank buttressed with stone.

*Coat-how.*—The homestead at the foot of Gate Crag in Loughrigg, standing between the two ancient fords of the Rothay, and opposite to the lower houses in Rydal, was held in the third quarter of the sixteenth century by Michael Benson, "clothier." That he was a rich man is certain, for in the joint purchase of freehold in Loughrigg in 1575, he acquired eight houses besides his own; and



*J. Harden, pinxit : Herbert Bell, photo.*

MILLER BRIDGE, 1843.

TO FACE P. 188.

we have seen that John Benson, of Little Langdale, who was at "variance" with him, was alarmed lest he should procure the manor of Baisbrowne, when John was forced to sell it in 1577.

Of these eight holdings in Loughrigg, three stood at the Fould; but the rest are difficult to determine, for they seem almost all to have been swept away. Two of them respectively rented at 5s. 9d. and 11d. and held at that time by Greiges, almost certainly stood in or near the present Grigg Field, which lies between Coat-how and Pelter Bridge. The site of one, probably the smaller of the two and subsequently known as Low-house, can be distinguished. The larger one may have survived as the present Field Foot, which emerges in 1773 as a freehold, paying a peppercorn rent to the lord. The Jopson farmhold of 2s. 10½d. rent, which included the vanished island of that name in the river, as well (probably) as Jopson Close by the lake, may have stood on the other side of Coat-how, in Steps End field, where some traces of a building may be seen; and possibly it was the "Steps End, Rydal," from which a birth was recorded as late as 1792. If the fourth—then in the holding of Richard Hawkrigge, rent 2s.—was again beyond this, it must have been the Heald, another vanished homestead whose ruins stand at the Waterhead of Rydal, and whose lands emerge later as a broken-up freehold. All these then Michael acquired from the manor of Rydal. And stretching beyond these again, was the freehold of Bainrigg, a portion of which was doubtless his, as we find it presently in the hands of his successors; there he must have worked the walk-mill established in the reign of Edward IV., as his predecessor John Benson worked it.

Michael, who had married one of the daughters of the rich Barnard of the Fould, was followed by his son Edward—possibly the Edward, son of Michael "of Loughrigg," baptized in 1574. Michael was dead in

1592; for a deed of that year \* which mortgages a close in Loughrigg near the "watterhead of Rydale" held by John Hauckrigg, son of Richard, to Squire William Fleming, declared it to be "of y<sup>e</sup> inheritance of Edward Benson, son of Michael Benson, dec." Edward of the "Coothow" buried his infant children Jane and Michael in 1601 and 1602; and it was probably he who was buried in 1623, under the description "of Loughrigg."

Edward was succeeded at Coat-how in the main line by several Thomases †; and signs are not wanting of a decreasing prosperity in this branch of the family, as in others. While a certain John Benson was paying a yearly interest of £1 12s. on a mortgage of his tenement in Baisbrowne to Squire John Fleming in 1631, the same lender holds the bond of Thomas Benson, of Coat-how, for a large loan on Bainriggs. The interest paid on this in 1631 was £8, and two years later an entry in the account-book shows that Thomas was making an effort to pay off the principal. It runs ". . . besides fiftie pounds more in tysons hand w<sup>ch</sup> he rec: of Tho. benson for Bainriges." But the effort was vain. In 1637 Thomas parted with this old possession of the family to the mortgagee for £100, including all woods, fordings, floodings, &c. The walk-mill was doubtless unremunerative by this time, and was probably later turned into a saw-mill.

The small farmholds, too, round Coat-how, which paid lord's rents to its owner, were lapsing into decay. We find Thomas of "Coatehow" agreeing to sell two of them to Edward Greig of Rydal, who held the property on the other side of the river now called Rydal Cottage. There is no date on the paper, which is only a draft, ‡ but as

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\* Rydal Hall MSS.

† That there was a subsidiary household here too is certain; for an Edward of Coat-how, whose wife died in 1638, was buried in 1699; and in 1655 Sir Daniel Fleming, while holding a bond of Thomas of Coat-how for over £30, lends George of the same place 12s. "upon his word and his cow."

‡ Rydal Hall MSS.

Edward died in 1672 or 1673, it must have been before that time. The two little farmholds are described as Jopson House, with Jopson Island, rent 1s. 2d. and Low-house, rent 9d. ; and as no present holders of them are mentioned, we may surmise them to be already derelict, and in the hands of their lord. If the third farmhold be Field Foot, the lordship of it was sold before 1773, when it is found to be a freehold possessed by William Harrison.

By 1674 Thomas of Coat-how was in difficulties ; for we find him paying to Squire Daniel Fleming 7s. 6d. for consent to a mortgage. Now this is singular, as such a tax or fine could only be demanded of a customary tenant by his lord. Perhaps Thomas was raising money on the piece of Bainrigg he acquired from Squire John Fleming's daughters, but failed to keep.

He was soon however to mend his fortune by marriage. He had lost his wife Susan in 1669, and on October 31, 1674—the year after his title of “gentleman” was printed in Blome's *Brittania*—he wedded Jane Fleming of Rydal. She was of the substantial statesman family who combined with their farm-hold the trades of inn-keeping and carpentry or wood-turning. She brought to her husband wealth in kind ; and they were not above receiving the usual village merry-making at their wedding. The squire of Rydal solemnly enters in his account book :—

Sent by my wife to Tho. Benson's wife home-bringing 00<sup>lb</sup> 01<sup>s</sup> 06<sup>d</sup>

And in the following February he goes to the sale of the Fleming farm stock.

Paid unto Tho. Benson of Coathow (w<sup>h</sup> was bought at his wife's Sale) for 59 old sheep & 17 Hogs 9<sup>lb</sup>, for Hay 34<sup>s</sup>, & for Oates & Stray 1<sup>lb</sup> 9<sup>s</sup> 7½<sup>d</sup>, in all vid. Acq. ... .. 12<sup>lb</sup> 03<sup>s</sup> 07½<sup>d</sup>

The same careful document records Thomas's death for September 28th of 1687, and his burial next day ; his wife Jane had died in 1681.

The next Thomas was at once involved in a bond with the squire of Rydal ; but it is satisfactory to find that he

was able in 1693 to pay £5 on a bill three days before due. And the family somehow scraped through, and maintained at least their homestead as a freehold. That it was of some dignity for those times is shown by the fact that Thomas (returned as freeholder in 1709) was taxed in 1727 for nine windows.

It seems that this Thomas's wife Dorothy may have been a rich woman. She was at least a good church-woman, as her three gifts of plate to Grasmere Church attest. One was a cup, given when the church plate was renewed in 1714; another an alms-dish, given 1729; the third a paten with the makers' date only on it, 1731-2.\* Strangely enough, all three bear, along with her name, different coats of arms, though each of the three is an attempt after coats of different families of Bensons given in Burke. We must conclude therefore that Mrs. Dorothy was undetermined as to the heraldic device her husband was entitled to carry, and left the matter to the silversmith, who only in the alms-dish engraved the three trefoils on a bend which the Bais-browne Bensons had borne, and to which probably the Coat-how branch had the best claim.

She and her husband, to judge from mention made of them in the Rydal Hall correspondence of that period, were esteemed gentlefolk, and associated with the families of property in the neighbourhood. She died in 1732; and when her husband died also, there was no heir to follow. The place seems to have been sold to the Mr. John Langton who acquired also the greater part of the Benson freeholds at High Close and Fould; and we find him writing in 1756 concerning the alteration of the road across Grigg Field. In 1785 Mrs. Langton, widow, sold it with all lands for £850 (after asking one thousand guineas) to Sir Michael Fleming.

From that time, until Crow How Farm was built, it

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\* *Old Church Plate in the Diocese of Carlisle.*

was used as the Rydal demesne farm, which had previously been close behind the Hall. Later it was let as two cottages. Its great, comfortable house-place sheltered the first Rydal Sunday School, as well as the village day-school: till some inspector, finding it not of the regulation type of building, caused it to be closed, when the few children were despatched to Ambleside. Until 1902 it stood picturesquely, its wide porch opening on the path to the ford, and its half-timbered back abutting on the slope of rock behind; while the great barn flanked it to the south. It has now been transformed into what the builder would describe as a commodious dwelling-house, fitted up for modern requirements.

*Bainrigg and The Heald.*—The fortunes of the first and only ancient freehold of Bainrigg, as they are concerned with the scheme of this paper, have been sufficiently given. It finally passed from the Bensons in 1637 as we have seen, and it was treated from that time, by the owners of Rydal Hall, as customary lands in their demesne. When Daniel Fleming assumed the lordship, the dwelling-houses upon it, though still described as two tenements, had probably disappeared. Nothing is left of the home of the de Bainbriggs, who once paid half-a-pound of cumin yearly to the distant lord of the fee; and of the once busy walk-mill not one stone stands on another. Thick woodland spread over the whole, and the recent discovery of the bed of the old mill-race by the woodman seemed at first a mystery.

It is interesting that a tradition still exists of the Bensons having once possessed the place; and indeed the family held its own about this quarter of the parish, between the two lakes, until quite recent times. At Taile End\* they were but customary holders, but John there built a substantial house, with his initials and date

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\* Where the township of Grasmere "tails" off. Sir Daniel Fleming speaks of the "tail end" of his manor of Beckermert.

1661, which stands to this day ; and of his large family George, who was churchwarden in 1700, followed him.

Beyond Taile End was Nichols, a home of the Bensons at least since 1675, when a George of the place married Margaret Jackson, and had children baptized till 1682. It has vanished, though its site is recorded in Nichols Field, by the lake ; and the house stood just at the fork of the roads that cross the fell into Langdale by Hunting Stile and Red Bank, in a position very favourable for an inn, which tradition says that it was. Jane Benson, widow, is cited as a Quaker, and non-payer of rates, in the years 1705, 1706, 1707, and again in 1712, when she is stated to be of Nichols in Grasmere. Perhaps she was widow of Francis, who appears in a list of unlicensed ale-house keepers of 1678, and the last of that line.

On the near side of Taile End, within the boundary of Loughrigg, was the freehold of the Heald, where the Bensons retained a portion of land till little more than forty years ago. At the time its name is first mentioned, this estate had already been broken up, and its arable fields secured by the wealthier statesmen of the neighbourhood, and worked with their farms ; Mr. Roberts, of Ellers in Loughrigg, to this day owns the intack of Patrach Close. One branch of the Bensons, however, managed to hold on to the rocky arm that reaches down to the former ford, where the old homestead (yet discernible in ruins) once stood, and from which the child of a tenant had been baptized as late as 1737. This portion was possessed in 1799 by a John Benson.\* It was probably his widow who in 1810 is found in possession (besides Fishgarths and lands about Clappersgate) of Heald Coppice, † and to whom the quarrymen (or slate-rivers) working at White-moss paid by agreement 2d. a year, for permission to pass from Loughrigg and Langdale (where they lived) to their work through her "coppice at Heald"; thus ensuring that

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\* Highway book for township of Rydal and Loughrigg.

† Valuation book for same.

the direct path they would strike from Red Bank to the ford did not become a public one. The wooden bridge put up probably at that time is still called Slater's Bridge. In 1837 and 1843 a William Benson was in possession of the same.\* But in 1866 the long ownership ceased. John Benson, leather factor, of Liverpool, and Isaac Benson, book-keeper, of Kirkby Lonsdale, then executed a deed of sale with the trustees of the Rydal Hall estate, by which there passed from the family that last parcel of land, "known as Oakrigg at Heald." But in reality it is called to this day, Benson's Coppice; and so preserves the name of the family in a quarter of the parish where for four hundred years they were freeholders.

#### CONCLUSION.

It is difficult to assign causes for the loss of that trade which once brought prosperity to our valleys, and made from fullers and clothiers, freeholders whose names were entered among the lists of gentry. The woollen trade, though it may have existed earlier, received a strong impulse in this district, as we have seen, in the reign of Edward IV., and it was also in that period that the Bensons first acquired land by the Rothay at Bainrigg. By the time that Henry VII. ascended the throne great strides had been made in the industry, and a Brathwaite is found (by rentals) to be working one of the walk-mills of Ambleside, and a partnership of three Bensons enclosing fell-land in Langdale. Probably the height of prosperity was reached in Henry VIII's reign; but in Elizabeth's—though the clothiers were still investing their money in land—the beginning of the decline had come, and Grasmere mills at least were found too many. The well-known Kendal cloth was no longer held in such esteem by the London citizen and apprentice; a new fashion and new colour perhaps had arisen; and smoother

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\* Rate and Valuation books.

textures caught the fancy of the purchaser. Then to that languishing London trade the death-blow was probably struck by the plague, which appeared in our valleys in 1577. The first outbreak lasted over a year. A second came in 1597 and 1598, which was more severely felt in the towns, 2,500 people being carried off in Kendal alone.\* It is impossible, from the ill-kept registers of Grasmere, where whole months and even years are found wanting in the plague period, to arrive at any reliable conclusion as to the reduction of the population in the parish; but when we find twelve burials entered in November, 1578, and again (December being blank) ten for the following January, it is clear that this was considerable.† Indeed, the tradition of the plague remains to this day in Langdale (where it seems to have raged the worst) strong and fixed. Several versions of the story of its introduction are told, and a little mound overgrown with trees is pointed out where a cottage once stood, whose inmates sickened and died, and were left till the walls fell in ruins upon them. Such a tale implies great callousness and fright on the part of the neighbours, or else a visitation of such severity that the few who remained sound were unequal to cope with it. The Langdale folk indeed found themselves unable to carry the dead of the valley to the consecrated earth of their church at Grasmere; for a little plot of ground under bleak Lingmoor, ringed round with broken walls, and overgrown with alien laurels, is shown as the place where these were buried. It was perhaps here that the Hawkshead man was laid, about whom there is so strange an entry in the register, on January 8th, 1578,‡ and whose death by plague is attested by the asterisk preceding it:—

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\* See inscription in Penrith Church.

† Eighty-six burials took place at Hawkshead in 1577, as against forty-eight of the previous year. In 1597 again there were eighty-four. (*Hawkshead Parish Registers*, by Mr. H. S. Cowper).

‡ See *Hawkshead Registers*, by Mr. H. S. Cowper.

Anthony Dixson buried in Langdall the last day of December and taken up agayne and brought to Hauxhead the xj<sup>th</sup> day of January.

This bespeaks wanton and wilful risk, rather than fright. The plot lies beyond the homesteads of Baisbrowne and Oakhow ; and the now disused road that ran past them to Side House, and the last recess of the valley, must for long have been shunned as poisoned and haunted.

The ruined walls that stretch everywhere around this barren, rocky slope of sepulchre speak of the effort of a previous age to make the soil produce more than it could, and of a sudden collapse of man in his struggle with nature. The valleys no doubt, under the stimulus of the cloth trade, had become—unless food had been imported—over populated ; and the markings of the plough which some fields reveal to us on patches that now yield but a scanty pasture of grass, point doubtless to some cottar's efforts to grow a sufficiency of oats for his household bread. In the valley of the Rothay these furrows are in several instances found in the neighbourhood of vanished homesteads.

The plague too would find an easy victim in the weaver, whose sedentary life weakened a frame often under-fed ; and the small cottage homes where his loom was plied ceaselessly during the hours of light would be the first and the worst stricken. And the web just finished, or that hung unfinished in the loom where his hand fell from it, who would buy ? Michael Benson and his fellow clothiers, of Loughrigg, must indeed have had work about the years 1577-80 to find cloth enough to keep their pack-horses a-march to the market ; and how shy would purchasers be to take goods from a stricken district ! There is a tradition, indeed, that pictures in a lively manner the disorganization of trade that the recurring epidemic produced. A great, flat-topped stone ~~on~~ Armboth common is called to this day the Web-stone, because thither (it is said) the websters or weavers

carried their webs to be sold, since all markets in the towns were closed while the plague raged, and terror kept men away from dwellings.

There is then reasonable ground for fixing the decline of the cloth trade, and the shrinkage of population that followed hard upon it, to the fourth quarter of the sixteenth century; and we have seen how many owners of walk-mills and master-fullers fell about that time into difficulties, and lost their freehold estates, while many customary farmsteads on their freeholds fell into neglect and ruin. The Kendal trade in woollen cloths was not indeed entirely lost. The little Westmorland town bravely sought another market, and instead of clothing the London citizen with her so-called "cottons," sent them off to the new tobacco plantations of Virginia, for the planter to dress his slaves in them. And Sir John Lowther, who erected the port of Whitehaven on the Cumberland coast, tried to secure for it the consignment of the Kendal goods abroad, as his correspondence with Sir Daniel Fleming shows\*; only the Westmorland clothiers, accustomed from immemorial times to export wool and cloth by York and Hull, and by Newcastle, hung back for long from a venture on the western coast. Still, the pack-horse track that may be traced along Greenburn Bottom and the ridge falling northwards to Borrowdale, may be the mark of an effort to divert a trade route westward, and to avoid the toll always exacted on Dunmail Raise.

Kendal recovered her trade in part, but our valleys did not. The canny folk, reduced in numbers, turned their energies to other channels. Fullers became tanners; old walk-wheels turned carding-mills, and presently bark-mills, saw-mills, and bobbin-mills; even paper-mills were run in Ambleside and Troutbeck. Of the carding-mills, which "teased" the rough wool ready for the home-

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\* See Rydal Hall MSS.

spinners, in place of the hand-cards, there were two, according to tradition, under Loughrigg, one of them being at Fox Gill. And still the hand-loom clicked in the homesteads, making the rough grey cloth needed for the folk of the valleys, which was carried to the Monday market at Hawkshead to be sold; till the days of machinery came, slaying even that small trade.

The Benson clan, that had appeared and spread with the cloth trade, shrank and died out with it. In the township of Grasmere alone, there were in 1603 at least seven Bensons who were customary landholders\* ; by 1675 they had diminished to four † ; in 1835 not one was left. ‡ The few inhabitants remaining in the valley of the name are remembered as wallers, who moved about the country side as business called them. To a bridge built by one of them near an old Benson homestead in Far Easedale the name Willie-good-waller is still attached; and a Benson born in this homestead is said to have died not longer than twelve years ago in Keswick.

But dire poverty had by this time fallen on our district, as the books of the Overseers of the Poor show; and the rapidly diminishing class of statesmen, who followed husbandry on their holdings, struggled in vain to support their paupers by rates, and fell themselves in the struggle. But with them our paper has nothing to do. The tourists, who, on first coming, found our valleys desolate, are filling them now with a population that brings its money from afar.

\* Court Roll. 207, 111. Public Record Office.

† Rental. Mr. G. Browne's MSS.

‡ List of landholders possessed by Edward Wilson. To him, whose long connection with the church of Grasmere, and whose excellent memory make him an authority for the recent past, I am indebted for many particulars.

## APPENDIX I.

[1571]. RYDAL HALL MSS. PARCHMENT.

Articles of Agrement maid y<sup>e</sup> xiiij day of May in the xiiij<sup>th</sup> yeare of the Reigne of ou<sup>r</sup> sovaigne laidy Elizabeth by the grace of god of ingland france and Ireland quene Defender of the faith (2 letters) Betwene John Benson of langdaill in the countye of Westm<sup>r</sup>land gentleman of thone p<sup>t</sup>ys, And mychaell Benson of loughrigge clothier John Benson of elterwatter Edward Jackson of baisbrowne John Mealfell of the same & Ryā wilson of y<sup>e</sup> wallend in langdaill Ten<sup>nts</sup> to y<sup>e</sup> said John Benson as well in the Ryghte of them selven as all oth<sup>r</sup> the said John Ten<sup>nts</sup> of baisbrowne elterwatter oakhowe or enye of them of thoth<sup>r</sup> p<sup>t</sup>ye witnesseth y<sup>t</sup> y<sup>e</sup> said p<sup>t</sup>yes are fully concluded & agreed in man<sup>r</sup> & forme folowinge v<sup>z</sup><sup>th</sup>

First it is agreed betwene y<sup>e</sup> said p<sup>t</sup>ies y<sup>t</sup> neith<sup>r</sup> the said John Benson nor his heires nor assignes shall hereafter at any tyme or tymes claim calfor chalendge aske require nor demand of them the said ten<sup>tes</sup> now beinge or of other ten<sup>tes</sup> to him or his heires hereafter to be or of anye of them any fine Income or grissome but onlye at the change of lord or Ten<sup>te</sup> The ten<sup>te</sup> rent solie to be dowbled and y<sup>t</sup> y<sup>e</sup> said Ten<sup>tes</sup> nor anye of them may or shall her<sup>er</sup> pay anye furth<sup>er</sup> fine incom or grissome to the landes lord or lordes but only as ys aforesaid And for the Ratifyinge of this agrement the said John Benson for him his heirs executors & administrators covenanteth & by theis p<sup>re</sup>ntes granteth That he y<sup>e</sup> said John his heires & assignes shall at all tymes hereaft<sup>er</sup> allow maintaine & support the same agrement to stande & be one accustome & so to continew from hensforth for ever betwene lord & ten<sup>ts</sup> ther And that the said John Benson his heires or assignes shall sealle & deliv<sup>r</sup> to the said mychaell Benson & others aforementioned ther exectours or assignes to the use of them and all other the said ten<sup>ts</sup> w<sup>th</sup>in the space of two yeares next insewinge the dait of theis articles upon one month of warning & monicion gyven to the said John his heires or assignes by the said Mychaell or any other aforementioned the executoures or assignes of them or anye of them all suche Writinge and assurance as shalbe demised or advised by the said Michael Benson others aforementioned anye of them or their counsell learned for the P<sup>fitte</sup> & assure coroberacon confirmacon & establishment of this said agrement to be & contynew one acustome in man<sup>r</sup> & forme aforesaid for ever

Also y<sup>e</sup> said John Benson by theis p<sup>re</sup>nts Covenantith granteth bargaineth and selleth unto y<sup>e</sup> said Mychaell Benson others aforementioned to thuse of them & all others the said ten<sup>ts</sup> all & singular

such woddes as are growing or herafter shall grow w<sup>thin</sup> baisbrowne elterwater & oakhow w<sup>thin</sup> the tearme of such grant as they shall or may have & purchase at thandes of the said John of the said wooddes to have use occupye cuttdoune and carry away at their pleasure all & singuler the said wooddes as they amongst them selves shall agreye (excepted & resservid) fourtie oakes w<sup>ch</sup> be now marked & appointed for y<sup>e</sup> lordes buildinges and thoise to be taken & cut-down at y<sup>e</sup> pleasure of y<sup>e</sup> lord his heires or assignes Also (for prised & excepted) to thuse of the said lord and his heires fourtye loides of fyer wodde yearly during the said grant to be cutt doune within suche places as shall please the said Ten<sup>tes</sup> to cutt y<sup>e</sup> same And lykewise exceptid all such oakes as are now already marked for timber to stand & Remaine on the grond there as they now grow or be unto suche tyme as y<sup>e</sup> said ten<sup>tes</sup> [shall ?] neide thos for ther buildinges and y<sup>e</sup> same oakes to be taken and cutdowne as the said ten<sup>tes</sup> and any of them shall builde p<sup>vided</sup> alwayes y<sup>t</sup> y<sup>e</sup> said Ten<sup>tes</sup> be at liberty to cropp y<sup>e</sup> fortye oakes Resservid before to the lordes buildinges at all tymes as occacon shall s<sup>erve</sup> and of thother oakes resservid for timber And also y<sup>e</sup> said Ten<sup>tes</sup> upon foure dayes monicon gyven unto them by y<sup>e</sup> said John his heires or assignes from tyme to tyme as occacion shall require shall cutdowne yearly during y<sup>e</sup> said grant y<sup>e</sup> said fortye loides of fyer woodd ther & in such places w<sup>thin</sup> the said baisbrowne elterwatter & oakhow or anye of them as shall please the said Ten<sup>tes</sup> & y<sup>e</sup> same snagge & marke reidy to loidinge & the said John & his heires executores or assignes lead convey & carrye away yearly the same on his & their charge

And further y<sup>e</sup> said John benson covenantith & grantith that neith<sup>er</sup> he the said John his heires nor their assignes or other p<sup>son</sup> or p<sup>sons</sup> in his and ther right herafter shall wrongflye vex molest nor trouble y<sup>e</sup> said ten<sup>tes</sup> nor anye of them for abowtes nor towchinge their tenementes anye of them nor any custome hertofore hadd & used amongst them but ratify the same to y<sup>e</sup> said ten<sup>tes</sup> according to y<sup>e</sup> trew intent herof

And also yt is agreid betwene y<sup>e</sup> said p<sup>ties</sup> that in consideracon of the trew accomplishment of y<sup>e</sup> p<sup>romis</sup>is the saide mychaell benson John benson and others afornamed as well for themselves as all other ten<sup>tes</sup> of baysbrowne elterwatter & oakhowe have not onlye contented & paid before & at the sewlinge & deliv<sup>er</sup>ye herof to y<sup>e</sup> said John Benson the some of (?) lvij<sup>ij</sup> xij<sup>d</sup> of y<sup>e</sup> w<sup>ch</sup> the said John grantith him contente & paid & therof acquitted & by these p<sup>ents</sup> Discharge the said mychaell others afornamed & all other y<sup>e</sup> said ten<sup>tes</sup> enye of them thexecutours & administrators of them & enye of them for ever but also by theis p<sup>entes</sup> covenantes & grantes to

content & paye or cause to be contented & paid to y<sup>e</sup> said John benson his executors assignes the some of (?) xxviiij<sup>li</sup> xix<sup>s</sup> in lawfull English monye over and besides y<sup>e</sup> said lviiij<sup>li</sup> xij<sup>d</sup> in man<sup>r</sup> & forme folowinge (that is to saye) in & on the fyrst day of the moneth of August y<sup>t</sup> shalbe in y<sup>e</sup> yeare of o<sup>r</sup> lord god one thousand fyve hundreth seventy & two in langdaill chappell betwene thoures of eyght of the clocke before noine & foure of the clocke at afternoine in y<sup>t</sup> same daye xiiij<sup>li</sup> ix<sup>s</sup> vi<sup>d</sup> And in or on the first daye of the moneth of August then next that insewinge in the same place & betwene lioke houres on that same day other the xiiij<sup>li</sup> ix<sup>s</sup> vi<sup>d</sup> in full & hole contentacon and paiment of fourescore seven pounds In witnes whereof y<sup>e</sup> said John benson to y<sup>e</sup> one p<sup>t</sup> of theis articles indentur remaininge in thands of the said mychaell benson and others aforenamed hath subscribed his name & to thother p<sup>t</sup> thereof remaininge in handes of the said John Benson the said michaell others aforenamed and sayd Ten<sup>tes</sup> have subscribed the names or markes the day and yeare first abovesaid 1571  
(not signed)

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## APPENDIX II.

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[1577].

RYDAL HALL MSS.

Nouuerint universi per presentes me Jacobum Braithwhaite de Ambleside in Comitatu westmerland generosum Teneri et firmiter obligari Johanni Benson de langdale in comitatu predict generoso in Quingentis et viginti Libris Bono Et Legali monete Anglie Soluend eid'm Johanni Aut Suo certo Atturnato heredibus Executoribus administratoribus aut assignatis suis Ad quem quidm soluendum Dat vndecimo Die Octobris Anno Regni Dne nre Elizabethhe Dei grā Anglie francie Et hibernie Regina fidei Defensor &c decimo nono

The Condicion of this obligation ys suche that whereas the aboue bounden James Braithwhaite haith purchased & boughte of the aboue named John Benson, All that the manno<sup>r</sup> of Baysbrowne lyeing & being in langdale in the Countie of westm<sup>er</sup>land w<sup>th</sup> all Ryhtes members & App<sup>ur</sup>tennces thereunto belonging & appertayninge, And all those two messuages & ten<sup>tes</sup> w<sup>th</sup> theyre app<sup>ur</sup>tennces lyeing & being in Langdale afforesaide in the saide Countye of westmerland thone whereof ys Comonly Called & Knowen bye the name of Elterwatter And the other is Comonly called & knowne by the name of aykhowe, As bye a pare of Indentures of Bargayne &

sale thereof made betwene the said John Benson on the one p'tye & the said James brathwhaite on the other p'tye, bearing Date the daie of the date of theis presentes emonge other thinges therein Contayened more at lardge Dothe & may Appeare, Nowe yt (?) the saide James Brathewhaite his heires Executo'es admynistrato'es or assignes or any of theme or Anye other person or p'sonz, havinge clayeminge or demanninge anye Estate, title or righte in & off the p<sup>re</sup>misses or in or of anye parte or p'cell thereof, in, bye, frome under, or through, his meanes title right assent Consent comandem<sup>t</sup> or p'curem<sup>t</sup>, or any other p'son or p'sonz, to whome hereafter he or theis shall Bargayne & sell the p<sup>re</sup>misses or any p'te thereof bie his meanes assent consent comandem<sup>t</sup> or procurement, Doe Not At Anye tyme or tymes fromhencefurthe, Gyve grannte Bargaine sell Exchaunge Devise conveye assuer or parte withe or suffer or cause to be gyven grannted bargayened solde Exchaunged devised conveyed assuered or p'ted w<sup>th</sup> to michaell Benson of loughrigg in the saide Countie of westmerlande Clothier or to his heires or assignes or Anye off theme, or to Any other p'son or p'sonz To that ende intent or purpose to assuer or Conveye, to the saide Michaell Benson or to his heires or assignes The Saide Manno<sup>r</sup> off Bayse-browne w<sup>th</sup> thapp<sup>ur</sup>tences or anye parte or p'cell thereof or the saide two messuages & tenem<sup>tes</sup> Called Elterwatter & Aykehowe or ayther of theme or anye p'te or p'cell thereof or the saide two messuages & tenem<sup>tes</sup> Contayened Mencioned & Specified in the saide Indentures of Bargaine & sale above mencioned to be bargayened And solde That then this present obligacion to be Voide & off none Effect or elles to stand & Remyne in full powre strength and vertue

Sigillat Et Delibat est Die Et Anno Suprascript in p<sup>re</sup>sencia nostra

Johes Will'msong (?)

John Flemynge

Thome Bethom

Robt buntinge

James Brathwait

(The seal, otherwise plain, is stamped with the initials R B)

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#### ADDENDA.

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Since this paper was concluded, some further references to the Benson family have turned up. And it is of interest to find that the earliest, one of the year 1338, occurs in association with the

milling industry, and a partnership. Truly, it is out of our parish, being away in Cumberland, and over the pass from that valley of Little Langdale where the Bensons later took such firm root. The reference is found in a partition of the great lordship of Egremont (Close Rolls, 12, Ed. III.), when one heir receives certain parts in Eskdale and Wastdale, "with all lands and mills there and the fishery, except the lands and services which William, son of Robert le Walker, and Ralph Benson hold there," and to another "two corn mills and a fulling mill, and with Wastwater and all the lands and services which William, son of Robert Walker and Ranulph Bensone hold in Eskedale."

Closer to our subject, however, and earlier than John Benson, grave of Grasmere in 1485, is the mention of a Thomas Benson "of Loghrig," who, at the Windermere Court of 1443, was fined 4d. for having allowed six pigs to stray in the lord's forest. (Court Roll, 21, Hen. VI., July 9, 1443. Attachments of Aldparke). Again, West states that a daughter of Myles Sawrey, of Graythwaite, married, in the time of Henry VIII., a Benson "of Laughrig." (*Annals of Furness*). Also, when fifteen approved and prominent men of the district were chosen as arbitrators for the just division of the forest between Ambleside and Troutbeck, in 1550, three Bensons were among them: Edward of the High Close, a John, of Grasmere, and a "Johnal [ius] Jenkyn" of Loughrigg.

The following transactions between Rydal Hall and the family may also be added. They show that the freeholder could "coal" his timber and sell it without remonstrance; and that the Fould Bensons became cattle dealers and tanners.

"1675. June 7. Francis Benson pays for a 'skin had long since' 6s. 6d.

1678. John Benson of Tailend is paid for four sacks of charcoal, 5s. 4d.

1692. Francis Benson, 'of the Fold in Loughrigge,' pays 8s. od. for grazing oxen in the park.

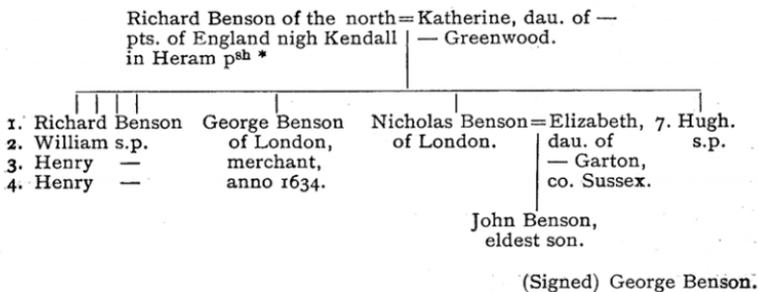
1697. June 4. Bernard Benson of the Fold is 'allowed' £17 2s. 10d. 'for 20 loads and 2 sacks of char-coals delivered at Coniston Forge at 17s. y<sup>e</sup> Load.'

In the days before the Rydal estate smelted its own iron, we have an entry (in an account book of 1643) of the purchase of 100 weight for 18s. od. It was made from Mr. Robert Brathwaite, who is thus shown to have continued to work the foundries left by his father.

Mr. George Browne of Troutbeck kindly communicates the subjoined pedigree, from the Visitation of London, 1633-4-5 (Harleian Society, vol. i., p. 65), showing how the Bensons of the barony of Kendal founded a branch in the south :—

BENSON.—Three goats' heads erased, between a chevron sable charged with three escallop shells of the first. Crest; a goat's head party per fess, sable and gules, charged with an escallop shell argent.

*Vintry Ward.*



CORRIGENDA.

P. 169. Thomas Brathwaite did not become head of the family till his father's death in 1654.

Two relevant entries in the church registers were overlooked, in the burial, in 1668, of Jane Mackereth, "wife of Miller of Loughrigg," and that of "Miller Mackereth" himself, in the following year. As High Miller Bridge was held for many generations by the Mackereths, a corn-mill must have been situated there, and worked up to this date, at least; possibly the closing of it caused the establishment of that "Horse Miln" in Clappersgate, which was complained of in 1704, as affecting the profits of the Ambleside mill. (See "Ambleside town and Chapel.")

Thanks are due to Mrs. Clay for permission to reproduce two of her father's water-colours of the neighbourhood of Miller Bridge; and to Mr. W. Bell for Green's etching. It is only by the kindly co-operation of neighbours, friends, and landowners, who will allow the inspection of their deeds, that local history can be written; and to many helpers in this small venture I owe grateful thanks.

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\* Probably a contraction for Heversham parish. The local pronunciation is "Hersam."