A SKETCH OF THE HISTORY OF THE ABBEY OF ABINGDON.

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Read before the Society on the 22nd March, 1881.

THE work of Dugdale *(Monast. Angl.)* is well known as containing a summary of all the knowledge that remains to us of the old monastic institutions. His authorities for the history of the Abbey of Abingdon appear to have been chiefly one of the Cottonian MSS. in the British Museum, and a tract of Florence of Worcester, in the Lambeth Library.

Of late years, however, a great service has been conferred upon investigations of this kind by the series of publications set on foot by the late Master of the Rolls; and the Chronicle of the Abbey of Abingdon as preserved to us in the Cottonian MSS. has been edited by the Rev. Joseph Stevenson in a careful and scholarlike manner that deserves the warmest thanks of all who are interested in such enquiry. It is difficult to exaggerate the value of the picture thus presented to us. It appears to have been written by a man who was not ignorant of classical learning, and though apt to fall somewhat into turgid metaphor, it is often by no means lacking in force and piquancy.

It is chiefly from a careful study of this interesting work, aided very greatly by suggestions derived from the learned preface of the Editor, that I have endeavoured to cull those portions which seem fittest for my purpose on the present occasion.

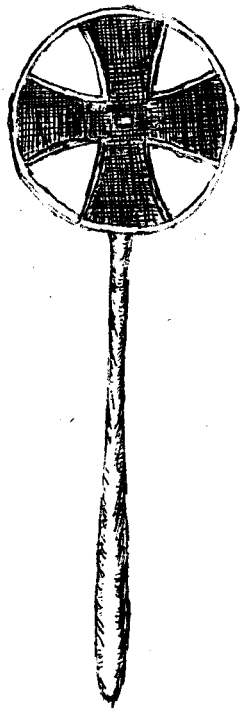
The work professes to be a manuscript of the various charters by which, as title-deeds, the monks held their large possessions. After the recital of the deed of gift, the description of the property is given, sometimes in Latin, but for the most part in Anglo-Saxon. The descriptions proceed by designating certain marks either natural or artificial by which an imaginary line is traced, passing right round the land until it returns to the starting point. These documents are interspersed with notices sometimes biographical, but more frequently of the disputes and heart-burnings attendant on the possession of a large and scattered property, arising from threatened or inflicted

losses, or sometimes successful defence or recovery. All is written, no doubt, with an *ex parte* method of representation, and with a decided bias in favour of the writer's own Foundation, but all is transparently open, and everything is stated with the utmost simplicity.

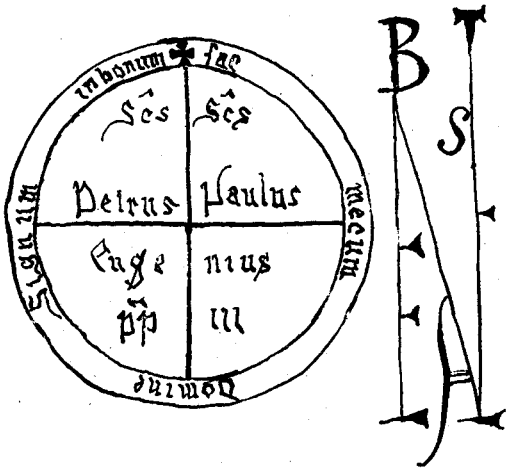
Unfortunately the Chronicle ends almost with the 12th century, but it deals with that portion of the history of the Monastery which is, perhaps, of all, the most interesting. It unfolds to us its gradual increase of wealth and importance from its infancy to its full strength. It describes the incursion of the Danes, and the more complete revolution owing to the success of the Norman Invasion, and is continued just sufficiently long to show how, by bending before the blast of oppression, by patience and tenacity of purpose, it gained possession of the Norman mind and was enabled to develop its full splendour. It abounds in curious details of much interest to the local antiquary; and many points relating to the inner life of ancient England which are hardly within the scope of the more dignified historian. One thing which strikes us is the great and remarkable absence of anything relating to a former Celtic population. The conclusion is irresistible, that the Saxons on their immigration found a thin and scattered population which was either exterminated, or retreated westward to the fastnesses of Wales; with them vanished all local names except those of the Rivers, the Thames, the Kennet, the Loddon, the Ock, and the Avon. The chronicler indeed would have us believe that the name of the Monastery itself is of Celtic origin, as derived from a monk of the name of Abennus who came from Ireland and received from the King of Britain a great part of the province of Berks, in which he founded a monastery which he gave the name of Abendonia. But as this happened in the time of Diocletian, and the monks were under the rule of Benedict, who was not born till about two centuries later, it would seem that our chronicler was not particularly well acquainted with history. But we see in the words "maxima pars Berrocencis provinciæ" a lurking design to set up a shadowy title to the claims and possessions of the monastery as then existing, which should antedate all charters of the Anglo-Saxon Kings, who would be therefore, by their grants, only restoring to the monastery its ancient rights.

A little later, when we begin to touch ground in real history, we are informed that Abingdon was originally a royal city of the name of *Seovocesham*, *i.e.* the home or abode of *Seovoc*. This name, no doubt the appellation of some Saxon chief, appears later in other combinations, and is still preserved in the name of a town between Radley and Sunningwell called *Sugworth*. In this town of *Seovocesham* or *Abingdon*, the writer tells us that, on digging, images and crosses were found, a sure sign of the ancient Christianity of the Britons who had dwelt there before, and amongst other crosses was found one famous Black Cross (Plate II.) made, as

Fig. II



The Black Cross.



Facsimile of Seal of Pope Eugenius III.
to the Grant of Privilege to the Abbey
23 Dec. A.D 1146.

it was believed, out of the nails of our Lord's Cross, and sent here either by the Empress St. Helena, or her son Constantine. In those days it was kept in a Chapel dedicated to St. Helena on this spot. By its reputation it was declared to have been the instrument of detecting many frauds and perjuries, and other miracles were wrought by it, and when one of the hillmen, skilled in the goldsmith's art, would have set it in ornamental work of gold and silver, whatever he put on one day fell off the next, so that it was preserved wrapped only in linen.

Ceadwalla, who was baptized and died at Rome, A.D. 689, was the first founder of the Abbey by granting a tract of land at Abingdon to Hean, a man of noble birth, who was the first Abbot with 12 monks under him. This appears to have been the invariable number of monks, and to have so continued, as we shall see, down to the time of the suppression of the monastery. Ceadwalla was succeeded by Ina, who at first voided the gift of land to the monastery, but afterwards relented and gave to Hean a charter for 273 hides of land in *Bradfield*, *Bestleford*, *Streatley*, *and Ermondslea*, this was probably in the year 699. We find no further mention of Bradfield or Streatley, or Bestleford; Ermondsley is probably another name for *Appleton*, which was always more or less connected with the Abbey. The same king conferred on the Abbey the manor of *Goosey*, which was always held by it.

It is not intended to go through the whole of the gifts thus made by royal charter at various times before the arrival of the Normans, but it would seem that many of the gifts in some way or other slipped away from the possession of the monastery, and possibly the state of the kingdom under the Heptarchy was such that land was lost unless the title was repeatedly renewed by charter. The very next gift to that of Goosey may illustrate this. It is the charter of *Easton*. I believe by this is designated *Aston (Tirrold and Upthorpe)*. The first charter is a gift of this land by Brihtric, in 801, to a chief called Lulla, whose name is possibly preserved in a farm situate in this parish called *Lollendon*. This charter is in Latin with certain objects in the Anglo-Saxon tongue. This land Lulla gave to Abingdon, who placed the deed of gift on the altar, at the same time saying, "All my rights that I had in Aston I give to S. Mary in Abingdon." It nevertheless again appears in a charter of Edgar to his Queen Ælfrith, in A.D. 964, with power to leave it at her death to whom she pleased. The boundaries are all given in Anglo-Saxon. Shortly after it appears as one of the Abbey documents, but how the land came to them does not appear; the boundaries, here also, are in Anglo-Saxon. The description varies in all three, yet there are some points of connexion in each. It would seem that in the year 801 some traces of the Roman occupation still lingered, for reference is made to a place which is called *Stan-cestil*, which I think can be no other than the old Roman camp on *Lowbury*, where not improbably some guard house had been left in a ruinous state. It is certain, however, that

somehow the manor was lost by Abingdon, for it belonged latterly to the Abbey of Witham. Nevertheless there was an altar of S. Edmund of Abingdon, at Aston in 1260.

But we possess another cartulary of the possessions of Abingdon in the Domesday Book, wherein Aston does not appear as belonging to the Abbey. I shall presently compare these two documents with a third which is the list of the Abbey property at the time of their surrender, and I reserve any remarks I may have to make on the difficulties of identifying the names of places until then.

I will now endeavour to give as briefly as possible a gleaning of the history of the Abbey, and the first thing to be mentioned is the first trace of any privilege granted by the Pope to the Abbey. The sisters of King Kenwulf begged of him the vill of Culham, with leave to dispose of it after their death to the Abbey, where they desired to be buried. This the King granted, and moreover obtained from Pope Leo III. a privilege putting the church of Culham under the Abbot, in all respects exempt from the jurisdiction of any other ecclesiastic; at the same time the Pope in return begged of the King confirmation of all their privileges to the monks of Abingdon, which with some reluctance he granted. In about seven years later the huntsmen of the same king having given trouble to the Abingdon tenants by all kinds of exactions, the Abbot Rethun took a journey to Rome and brought back letters from the pope; nevertheless, after all he was afraid to present them lest the king should consider it an offence against his royal dignity, so he took occasion to talk the matter over with the king, and to be more secure in his negotiations he took with him £120 in gold and silver, and with this he softened the king's mind to free him and his abbey from all future exactions.

This papal privilege does not appear to have applied beyond Culham, for it is some centuries before we find the Abbot empowered to assume the mitre.

About the middle of the 9th century we find Ethelwolf giving the tithes of his kingdom to the churches free from all tax. About the same time Offa did the same for Mercia. The effect of this was to make general what had been the fruit of individual piety previously, but the status of tithe was not settled until 400 years later.

We now find loud complaints of the mischief caused by the inroads of the Danes, and amongst other places they extended their incursions to Abingdon. Hereon we are treated to a miraculous story of an image which took stones out of the wall and pelted therewith the Danes out of the monastery. The same image, later on, spoke to some of the brethren. Alfred is compared, however, to Judas for taking away from the monastery the government of the town of Abingdon as a scurvy return to God for the victory he had gained over the Danes at Ashdown. From other sources it would appear that Alfred was displeased with the monks because they did not furnish him with the material assistance, that might have been expected from them, against the enemy.

In 939 we find Hugh Capet sending to Athelstan to ask for his sister in marriage, on which occasion, besides valuable presents of gold and silver, he sent certain relics, viz. : part of a thorn and part of a nail from our Lord's crown and cross; the standard of S. Maurice, commander of the Theban legion, and martyr; and a finger of S. Dionysius, martyr; which relics the king deposited in a silver casket and kept in the Abbey of Abingdon.

A few years later we find the curious story of the dispute with their Oxfordshire neighbours about the right to a certain meadow between them and Iffley, which was settled by setting a lighted taper afloat on a shield, whereupon the shield ascended the stream and passed round the possessions that belonged to the monastery.

But evil times were coming upon the community; after the death of Edmund the monastery was almost deserted and the lands taken possession of for the king, "of the cause of which misfortune," says the chronicler "I have nothing certain to say."

The truth was not very flattering to the monastery if it had been told. The all but desertion of the monastery was owing no doubt to the general decay of religion, and with it of monastic fervour; this was partly caused by the anarchy which reigned during the Danish invasion, and the remissness which followed on the restoration of tranquillity. There had been, however, in Athelstan's court a youth named Ethelwold, whom, as he showed great promise of future worth, the king had placed for education with Alphege, Bishop of Winchester. Edred, at the instance of his mother Edgiva, placed him at Abingdon, which was almost a ruin,—materially and morally—and his worth attracted a fresh band of monks, and restored the monastery to its former state. Ethelwold was indeed associated with Dunstan and Oswald in a monastic reform which saved the system which had else received a fatal wound.

In 959 Edwy granted them the privilege of electing their own abbot; on the death of Edwy, his successor Edgar confirmed the Abbey in their possessions.

On the death of Edgar, the services of S. Ethelwold to the Abbey are recorded. He rebuilt the church and sent Osgar abroad to learn singing in order to teach the brethren the right way of conducting the service; he further gave a very handsome and weighty chalice, three gold and silver cups, and many other ornaments, amongst others a silver tablet valued at £300, which remained to the days of Abbot Vincent. He made with his own hands two bells, and Dunstan made and gave two others larger, and constructed a wheel full of bells to be chimed on festivals, but two false monks carried off all they could lay hands on of gold and silver from the monastery, stripping off the silver ornaments from this wheel, and made off to Normandy with their booty.

In 1015 a noble lady named Eadfleda gave the Abbey the land at Winkfield and Wickham, together with a casket of relics, a copy of

the gospels bound in gold and silver, with a silver cup, and a priest's vestment.

In 1034 King Canute had a casket made for the abbey of silver and gold to contain the relics of S. Vincent of Spain, together with two large statues, and at the same time Athelwin had another case made like the king's present in which he put relics of his own collecting and a silver cup which still remained in the church; and about the same time the relics of S. Edward, king and martyr, were brought to Abingdon. On this abbot's death, Siward, a monk of Glastonbury, succeeded, who intended to commence building on a more magnificent scale than Ethelwold, but Ethelwold appeared to him in a vision and informed him that service was reserved for a future abbot of great fame, so Siward turned his attention to the care of the poor.

It happened that a lady named Elgiva, a relation of Ediva, Queen of Edward, who generally lived on her property at Lewknor, at her death left it to the Queen, who managed the estate by a bailiff. Great complaint was made of his extortions, which were remedied by his expulsion. About this time the King and Queen came to visit the Abbey, and finding the boys of the Abbey who were in training, dining in the most meagre way off bread, the Queen in pity for them asked the King's permission to give Lewknor to the abbot in order to provide more liberally for their maintenance, with which the King readily complied. The monks found it had been given by a Dane, Novitovi, before, but owing to the unsettled times the Abbey had not come by its own. This story seems partly introduced to show the milder terms on which the Abbey treated their tenants. Siward was succeeded by Athelstan, and he again by an abbot Spearhavoc, who allowed Stigand to cajole him out of a lease of Cerney on condition of adding to their property at Lewknor, but when the time came Stigand would neither make over the new property nor return Cerney, and the chronicler rejoices at the imprisonment of Stigand by the Conqueror, who found him managing the affairs of the Archbishopric; Stigand's imprisonment lasted till his death, but Spearhavoc who meantime had been made Bishop of London, having got together a good purse, secretly made off from the kingdom. Ordric, the next abbot, gained some privileges from Edward the Confessor; this abbot, at the request of the citizens of Oxford, made a new cut from a little above Abingdon to just below the bridge in order to facilitate the navigation, and as an acknowledgement for this service every boat passing through had to pay to the cellarer of the Abbey 100 herrings.

The chronicler here relates with pain how at this time the abbots got into the habit of enriching themselves by granting leases for lives for sums of money, the consequence of which was, on the arrival of the Conqueror, the loss of the land, as the tenants were easily disposed of in favour of the followers of the Conqueror, who would not have touched church property in hand.

Aldred succeeded to the abbacy just before the battle of Hastings. After this the men of the Abbey making head against William, they were surrounded and badly handled, and the abbot himself put into Wallingford Castle, and afterwards committed to the charge of Walkelin, Bishop of Winchester, to the day of his death. The Abbey then suffered much by the unscrupulous visits of Normans.

William appointed Athelhelm, a monk who had been educated in Normandy, to succeed as Abbot.

And here we may pause a moment to review the status of the Abbey at that period as to material wealth. By the list we find no less than 120 properties, manors or portions of parishes, which had come into the possession of the monastery by the liberality of Saxon kings and nobles. Of these 7 are confessedly outside the counties of Oxford and Berks, which leaves 113 within those counties; of these Doomsday only has notice of 41, and the list of the suppression 44. What then are we to conclude about the large remainder of names? (See map on plate I.)

It would seem that many of the designations refer to portions of manors or parishes which are spoken of in the two other documents under one comprehensive name, and bear witness to that, not uncommon, desire by the owners of landed property, which shows itself in the acquisition of contiguous or intervening estates so as to bring all their property within what is termed a ring fence. Looking through the list it appears that 29 names might thus disappear, which leaves 84 substantive properties, so that, speaking roughly, there are about 40 estates in the two counties which were only transiently in possession of the Abbey, and of the remaining 44 some 10 were for a time wrested from them at the Conquest as the chronicler complained.

Of this we find more than a trace, a complete history in fact, of the transaction in relation to Kingston and Fifehide, though in the case of the last the old tenant is set down with a different name in Doomsday and in the chronicle; in the latter he is called Turkil, no doubt correctly, in Doomsday it is written Stanchil. It is curious to read the dry hard entry of the Conqueror's commissioner and contrast it with the prolonged and bitter complaint of the chronicler of the way in which his monastery was despoiled.

The entries in Doomsday book are as follows:—

"The same Henry (viz. Henry de Ferrars) holds *Kingston*, Ralph of him. Stanchil held it in the time of King Edward.

The same Henry holds *Fivehide*. Godric the Viscount held it in the time of King Edward."

The value of Kingston is set down at 50 shillings; Fifehide at £6.

It is a curious question whether these sums represent the real rent of the property paid to the lord, and whether they were unlet, or whether that was only the rateable value for the public service.

The Monastery placed in these hard circumstances, had reason to be thankful to the King for their new head. Norman by education,

but, as his name indicates, Saxon by birth, he was probably acceptable to both parties, and his influence with the King procured a royal mandate in favour of the monastery, which was exhibited in the open court in Berkshire, and the pretensions of the Abbey being asserted by skilful and eloquent pleaders, the enemies of the Abbey were soon silenced. But the dangerous and unsettled state of the country is pointedly described; daily conspiracies against the authority of the Conqueror shew their heads; the Castles at Oxford, Wallingford, and Windsor among others were built and garrisoned, and the Abbot was ordered to find a contingent which was posted near Windsor; for this purpose the Abbot hired certain foreign soldiers who opportunely came to hand. About this time some of the Abingdon men at arms in crossing the seas into Normandy fell into the hands of pirates who stripped and cut off the hands of some of them. The King ordered the Abbot to make decent provision for the maintenance of these who were thus disabled.

The Abbot with his Norman education and proclivities was fond of inviting Robert D'Oyley the custodian of Oxford Castle, and on one occasion the wily baron fairly talked the Abbot out of the possession of Tadmarton, to the great grief and consternation of the monks.

Here is related, with a conscious air of satisfaction, how William led his arms against Scotland and Wales with full success, and received hostages from the King of Scotland that he would acknowledge William as his suzerain. In these expeditions the Knights of the Abbey took part. The Abbot was very vigorous in exercising his authority, and personally righted the monastery; for instance—Alfsi, the king's bailiff in Sutton, having trespassed and cut wood in Bagley and Cumnor the abbot pursued him on horseback, and having got him at disadvantage made him wade through the Ock up to his neck without making for the bridge; and on another occasion having taken the Abbey's oxen to draw lead for the king's work, he upset the waggons, took back the oxen, and thrashed the bailiff with his own staff, but here, fearing he had overstepped the line of prudence, he posted up to the court and paid in a fine and got a proclamation to have the Abbey rights respected in future. He was making preparations to rebuild the Abbey church when he was stopped by death.

In the year 1087, the Prince Henry, the king's youngest son, as the king was in Normandy, spent Easter at Abingdon, in company with Robert D'Oyley from Oxford, and Miles Crispin from Wallingford. It has been said that the prince gained his learning at this monastery, if this were true it could hardly have escaped the pen of the chronicler: perhaps this visit gave rise to the tradition.

It has been narrated how Robert D'Oyley got undue possession of Tadmarton, we have now to tell of its recovery. In addition to this offence he had also taken possession of a meadow just outside the walls of Oxford to the great discomfiture of the monks. Now Robert fell ill and he had a vision, he seemed to be in a royal palace and to see a queen seated on a throne, and by her stood two

Abingdon monks, that at his entrance knelt before the queen and pointed him out as the man who usurped her possessions and caused their complaint; she ordered him to be thrust out of doors and carried to the meadow and there punished, so it was done, and being made to sit, some ill-behaved little boys brought hay from the meadow and having wetted it set it on fire around him and smoked him. As he groaned in his sleep his wife woke him, to whom he told his dream, and with her advice he vowed restoration, and as soon as he was well enough he made formal restoration of the Manor of Tadmarton on St. Mary's altar at Abingdon, but we hear nothing about the meadow. After this, however, he set about repairing the churches in and near Oxford, and dying shortly after was buried at Abingdon.

Athelhelm was succeeded by Rainald, who recovered a Lodging given the Abbots at Westminster by Gilbert de Gand.

In the year 1091 an enlargement of the old church built by Athelwold was taking place, but the foundations of the tower having been imprudently meddled with, on Friday morning, 28th March, as the brethren were going to sing matins, just as the procession had got down to the Chapter-house, the tower fell with a crash putting out the lights which the monks carried, and so they all fell to the ground expecting death, but found that no one had been hurt, and that the servants who were sleeping near, though surrounded with great stones, had also escaped injury. So the work was stopped till after Easter, when a fresh start was made.

The abbot, to gain means for the work, began to look about him; he found certain wrongs done to the poor, and that they likewise defrauded the Abbey of its just return of tithe; so he rectified the abuses under which they suffered under condition of their paying up their tithe.

Kingston and Peasemore were hamlets of Worth and Chieveley, and in both places the resident knights had had churches and cemeteries made and consecrated, but the Abbey insisted on both places owning its rights, and forced an acknowledgment to be made yearly to the rectors of the mother churches. Roger Bachepuiz was the name of the resident at Kingston, and here we meet with the origin of that distinctive name Kingston Bagpuze. The abbot Rainald was in favour with William Rufus, and gained from him recognition of all the rights of the Abbey, but upon his death the king put in one Modbert as a receiver of the Abbey rents, and made no appointment.

On the accession of Henry I. in 1100, he sent as Abbot, Faritius, an Italian by birth, of great ability and great erudition, who had been a monk at Malmesbury. He immediately set to work to renew the monks' lodgings and enlarge the church, and being a man of great influence gained much property and many privileges for the Abbey. His mode of dealing with a miller of Sutton, named Gamel, was very different from the conduct of one of his predecessors above-mentioned. This man used to take earth by night from the Abbey lands at Culham to make good his mill dam. The Abbot had him taken before

the justices of his hundred, and when he could give no account of himself they ordered him to pay 5 bags of pence to the abbot. The abbot having gained his submission took only 1 penny for each bag and returned him the rest, ordering the 5 pence to be kept as evidence in the Abbey chest.

About this time there was a stir made to get rid of the toll levied on the Oxford boats of 100 herrings each, but the Abbey held its own.

At the death of Faritius he was succeeded by Vincent, a monk of Jumieges. A great dispute arose about this time respecting the right of Abingdon to hold free market.—Ingulph had succeeded Vincent, and he in turn had been followed by Walkelin.—He had scarce come to his Abbey when the men of Wallingford combined with Oxford to move the king to stop the Abingdon market, which was desired to be free for all commodities. Vincent went to King Henry I. and, owing to the advocacy of the Bishop of Sarum, won over the king to look favourably on his petition, and for a benevolence of 300 marks to enforce the rights of the Abbey; to pay this he had almost to strip the tablet of St. Ethelwold of all gold and silver ornaments put on by the hand of her saint. So the affair slept for a time, but it was renewed in the reign of the second Henry; it was stated to him that the abbot had no such authority as he claimed under the charter of Henry I. The king gave a ready ear to their complaint, but as he was just setting out for Normandy he furnished the complainants with writing to stop the free market, promising to hear it fully on his return. Armed with this authority the men of Wallingford marched by force to clear the market, but this was too much for the abbot's men, they plucked up courage and ignominiously drove out the men of Wallingford. They, smarting under the defeat, sought out the king in Normandy, who directed the Earl of Leicester, the Chief Justiciary, to enquire into the affair; both parties were summoned, and the plaintiffs were disconcerted on finding that instead of the writ being as they hoped a decision in their favour, it was an order by the Justiciary to summon a jury of 34 aged men whose testimony was directly for the Abbey. But this did not satisfy the plaintiffs; the monks could not deny that some men on the jury were connected with the Abbey, so a new trial was ordered at Oxford, in which it was sworn that it was not a free market; the Justiciary went before the king at Salisbury and gave his own testimony, and that he had seen the market in full operation in the time of Henry I., and moreover his memory went back to the days of William I. when he had been educated within the walls of the monastery. The king therefore decided for the abbot, but not even yet satisfied the appellants appeared before the king at Reading; they told him they could not hold their feudal tenures if a market were allowed at Abingdon. This sort of threat was too much for the temper of the Plantagenet, and the king roughly drove them from his presence, and commanded that thenceforward a full market should be held at Abingdon, to which the abbot's tenants should be admitted and all others excluded. So

ended the dispute, which had entailed much calumny and expense on the abbot, but the chronicler evidently thinks it was well spent and that he could have done no less.

Walkelin before his elevation had been a monk of Evesham. He was succeeded by Godfrey, Bishop of St. Asaph, who held the Abbey *in commendam;* this evil practice may have led the way to an abuse which soon followed, for after the next incumbency of Roger, Prior of Bermondsey, the king refused to put in a fresh abbot, and governed the Abbey by the procuration of Thomas de Hepburn, that is to say the discipline of the house was carried on by the Prior, whilst the king's proctor received all the revenues for the king; and the whole estate of the Abbey would perhaps have been lost if reference had not been made to Ralph de Glanville. The case was stated in full court, and Ralph turning to the other justices said that the customs and rights of the Abbey were reasonable, and that the king did not wish and would not dare to impair them.

In 1189 Alured, Prior of Rochester, was appointed, and shortly after an Abbot named Hugh.

In 1221 William, Prior of Colne, succeeded, and in 1234, having died, the royal licence was obtained to elect his successor, and such seems henceforth to have been the invariable rule.

In 1262 Robert de Hendred was elected; he used the mitre and pontificals on Trinity Sunday, 1268, and is stated to have been the first Abbot with that privilege. He attended the Council at Lyons in 1272.

In 1289 Nicholas de Culham built the parish church of S. Nicholas just without the west gate of the abbey, and died on the Feast of S. Nicholas, 1307.

The line of Abbots who succeeded are mostly distinguished by the name of some one or other of the dependencies of the Abbey, which seems to have been what we may call a *close corporation.*

The names of the last mentioned: Henry de Tulford, John de Sutton, W. de Cumner, Richard de Boxford, Ralph de Hanney, and others testify to this; the only Abbot of name amongst these was John Sante, Ambassador at Rome in the reigns of Edward IV. and Henry VII. He and his predecessor and two successors built, or rather rebuilt, the central tower and body of the church, and added the tower at the west end.

And now we must draw to a conclusion. The Monastic system which had done so much good for the country during at least the infancy of society was doomed to destruction; that it was unmixed good no one will affirm, and that which probably was the source of the decay of the system, the vast possessions of men vowed to poverty, furnished the motive for their destruction.

The decree of Henry VIII. for their suppression went forth, and the last Abbot, who had been elected in 1514, after enjoying his dignity for 25 years, on the 14th February, 1539, with the rest of his community, signed the surrender of the monastery.

His seal which he affixed to the instrument of the surrender is here given, together with the arms of the Abbey, which no longer appeared on the coats of its knights and retainers. (Plate I.)

The abbot was rewarded with being allowed to keep the manor of Cumnor, which was valued at £223 per annum, until his death or until he should have preferment to that value. It is about the value of one of the richer deaneries, such as Durham or Canterbury.

The site of the monastery was granted in the 1st year of King Edward VI. to Sir Thomas Seymour. In the 5th year of the same king, to Sir Thomas Wroth.

The gross rental of the Abbey is stated by *Speed* at £2042 annually.

The nett annual rental is estimated by *Dugdale* at £1876.

The rest of the monks were pensioned as follows :—

	£	s.	d.
The largest pension, probably to the prior, was	22		
The next	20		
Four	8		
Five	7		
Two	6	13	4
Two	6		
Five	5	6	8
Two	3	10	0
Two	2	13	4

In all 24, that is probably 12 monks and 12 officers or lay brothers.

Of the Buildings very small remains exist, the chief feature being the western gateway; the buildings until lately used as a brewery, contained a few specimens of vaulting, — and that is all that remains of this great Abbey; but in the 15th century it was visited by a monk of Worcester, who has recorded for us the principal measurements of the church; the terms used are so many *virgæ*, and in some instances a duplicate measure is given in *gressus;* if 'gressus' is taken for a yard then the 'virga' would be 5 feet. If these units were so, the church would be of the enormous length of 630 feet, possibly the step may have been a short pace, and the virga—the mace which the verger carried,—an ell-wand, this would take off about a fourth from the value of the unit, and is the more probable statement. In any case the proportions would be the same, and upon these proportions the plan of the church is roughly restored. (See plan on plate I.) It plainly answers to its Norman origin, and of all the plans I have seen it approaches most nearly to the great Norman church of Peterborough.

The provision for the poor out of the Abbey revenues ceased with the Abbey; on fifteen of the great festivals the Abbot entertained at dinner 100 poor persons. Probably the distribution of alms and the mode of succouring the poor would not commend itself to the wisdom of the 19th century, which, however, is still far from having discovered the true method of dealing effectually with pauperism.

A feeble reflection of the charity of the great Abbey is now furnished by the foundation of Christ's Hospital.