READING ABBEY,

ITS HISTORY AND ARCHITECTURE,

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BEFORE one can fully appreciate or properly understand the History of the foundation of the Reading Abbey, it is necessary that some consideration should be given to the state of England at the time, and for, perhaps, the preceding half-century. Although in many respects the History of Reading Abbey has been most ably illustrated by the works of Coates, Man, and others, I think a little more consideration should have been given to the origin of its Foundation. I will therefore briefly refer to the early history of our country in order to discover the proper reason which should be assigned to the Royal Founder for undertaking or authorizing the establishment of so rich and powerful an institution at Reading.

We find that the Conquest was hardly over when the struggle between the baronage and the crown began. (A.D. 1075.)

The wisdom of the Conqueror's policy in the destruction of the great earldoms which had overshadowed the throne was shown in an attempt at their restoration made by Roger, the son of his minister William Fitz-Osbern, and the Breton, Ralf de Guader, whom the king had rewarded for his services at Senlac with the Earldom of Norfolk. The rising was quickly suppressed, Roger thrown into prison, and Ralf driven over the sea; but the intrigues of the baronage soon found another leader in William's half-brother, the Bishop of Bayeux. Under pretence of aspiring by arms to the papacy, Bishop Odo collected money and men, but the treasure was at once seized by the royal officers, and the Bishop arrested in the midst of the court. Even at the King's bidding no officer would venture to seize on a prelate of the church; it was with his own hands that William was forced to effect his arrest: "I arrest not the Bishop, but the Earl of Kent," laughed the Conqueror, and Odo remained a prisoner till the King's death. It was, in fact, this vigorous personality of William which proved the chief safeguard of his throne. "Stark he was" says the English Chronicler "to men that withstood him, none dared resist his will. Earls that did aught against his bidding he cast into bonds, Bishops

he stripped of their Bishopricks, and Abbots of their Abbacies." But stern as his rule was, it gave peace to the land. (A.D. 1087.)

With the death of the Conqueror, the terror which had held the Baronage in awe passed away, while the severance of his dominions roused their hopes of successful resistance to the stern rule beneath which they had bowed. William had bequeathed Normandy to his eldest son Robert. William Rufus hastened with his father's ring to England, where the influence of Lanfranc at once secured him the crown. The baronage seized the opportunity to rise in arms under pretext of supporting the claims of Robert, and Bishop Odo placed himself at the head of the revolt. The new king was thrown almost wholly on the loyalty of his English subjects, and their natural hatred of Norman lawlessness rallied them to his standard. Bishop Wulfstan, of Worcester, the one surviving Bishop of English blood, defeated the insurgents in the west, while the king himself beat them at Rochester; and at a later period the capture of Robert Mowbray, Earl of Northumberland, and the imprisonment and exile of his fellow-conspirators, again crushed the hopes of the baronage.

While the spirit of national patriotism rose to life again in this struggle of the crown against the baronage, the boldness of a single ecclesiastic revived a national opposition to the mere administrative despotism which had prevailed since the fatal day of Senlac. William Rufus inherited much of his father's energy, as well as his policy towards the conquered English, but he inherited none of his father's moral grandeur; his profligacy and extravagance soon exhausted the royal hoard gathered by his father, and the death of Lanfranc left him free to fill it at the expense of the church. During the vacancy of a see or abbey its revenues went to the royal treasury, and so steadily did William refuse to appoint successors to the prelate whom death removed, that at the close of his reign one Archbishopric, four Bishoprics, and eleven Abbeys were found to be without pastors. The see of Canterbury itself remained vacant till a dangerous illness frightened the King into the promotion of ANSLEM* who happened to be in England at the time on the business of his house.

William had no sooner recovered from his sickness than he found himself face to face with an opponent whose meek and loving temper rose into firmness and grandeur when it fronted the tyranny of the king. The Conquest had robbed the Church of all moral power, as the representative of the higher national interests against a brutal despotism by placing it in a position of mere dependence on the crown. And though the struggle between William and the Archbishop turned for the most part on points which have no direct bearing on our history, the boldness of Anslem's attitude not only broke the tradition of ecclesiastical servitude, but infused throughout the nation at large a new spirit of independence. The real character of the contest appears in the Primate's answer, when his remonstrances against the lawless exactions from the Church were met by a

* The real instigator of the Foundation of Reading.

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SKETCHES OF FRAGMENTS FOUND WITHIN THE PRECINCTS ·

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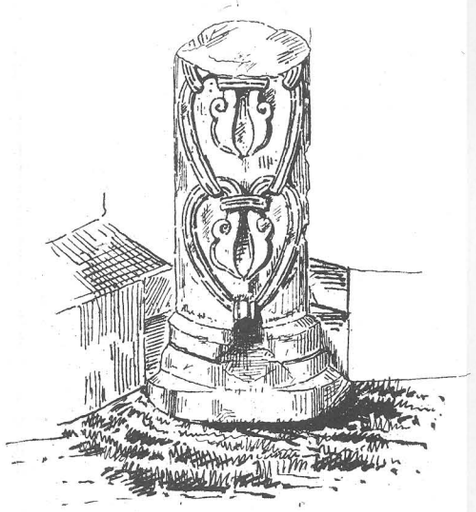
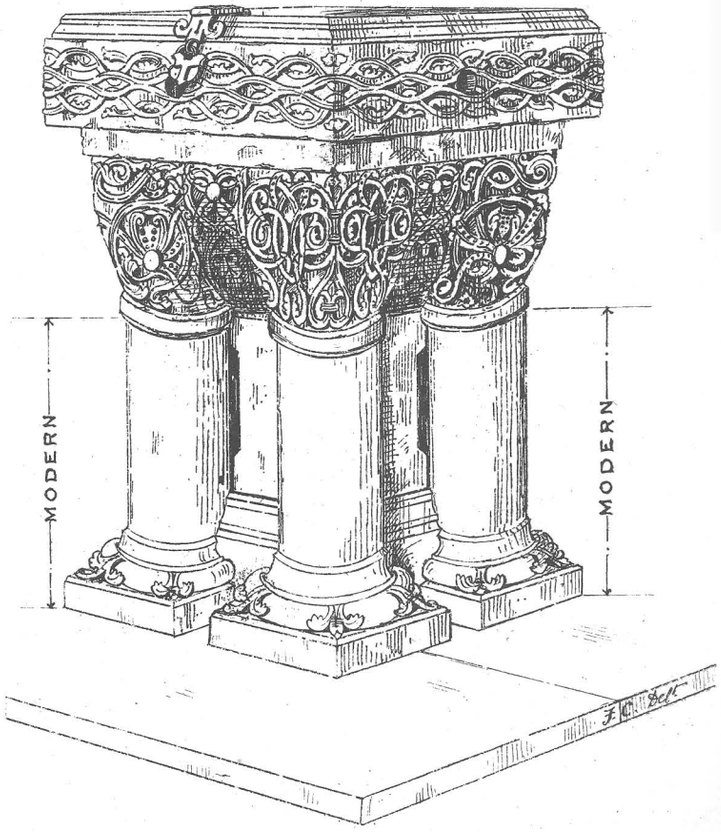


BASE AND LOWER PART OF SHAFT AS THEY NOW STAND AT ANGLE OF ST. THOMAS' CHAPEL

A CORBEL

PINNACLE 15TH CENTURY PROBABLY FROM A TOMB OR ALTAR PIECE. HAS BEEN RICHLY DECORATED IN GOLD AND COLOUR



"THE READING ABBEY STONE"

THIS HAS BEEN ADAPTED BY A.W. PUGIN. ARCHT. TO FORM FONT OF S.T JAMES, R.C. CHURCH.

demand for a present on his own promotion, and his first offer of £500 was contemptuously refused—"Treat me as a free man," Anslem replied, "and I devote myself and all that I have to your service, but if you treat me as a slave you shall have neither me nor mine." The Red King's fury drove the Archbishop from Court, and he finally decided to quit the country, but, his example had not been lost, and the close of William's reign found a new spirit of freedom in England with which the greatest of the Conqueror's sons was glad to make terms.

In the year 1100 the Red King died. Robert was still in the Holy Land, and the English crown was at once seized by his younger brother Henry, in spite of the opposition of the baronage, who clung to the Duke of Normandy and the union of their estates on both sides the channel under a single ruler. Their attitude threw Henry, as it had thrown Rufus, on the support of the English, and the two great measures which followed his coronation mark the new relation which was thus brought about between the people and their King. Henry's charter is important, not merely as the direct precedent for the Great Charter of John, but as the first limitation which had been imposed on the despotism established by the Conquest. The "evil customs" by which the Red King had enslaved and plundered the Church were explicitly renounced in it; the unlimited demands made both by the Conqueror and his son on the baronage exchanged for customary fees; while the rights of the people itself, though recognized more vaguely, were not forgotten.

Henry's marriage gave a significance to these promises which the meanest English peasant could understand. Edith, or Matilda, was the daughter of King Malcolm of Scotland and of Margaret the sister of Eadgar Ætheling. She had been brought up in the nunnery of Romsey by its Abbess, her aunt Christina, and the veil which she had taken there, formed an obstacle to her union with the King which was only removed by the wisdom of Anslem. The Archbishop's recall had been one of Henry's first acts after his accession, and Matilda appeared before his court to tell her tale in words of passionate earnestness. She had been veiled in her childhood, she asserted, only to save her from the insults of the rude soldiery who infested the land, had flung the veil from her again and again, and had yielded at last to the taunts and actual blows of her aunt—"As often as I stood in her presence," the girl pleaded passionately to the saintly primate, "I wore the veil, trembling, as I wore it, with indignation and grief. But as soon as I could get out of her sight I used to snatch it from my head, fling it to the ground, and trample it under foot. That was the way and none other, in which I was veiled," Anslem at once declared her free from conventual bonds, and the shout of the English multitude when he set the crown on Matilda's brow drowned the murmur of Churchman or of Baron. For the first time since the Conquest an English Sovereign sat on the English Throne. The blood of Cerdic and Ælfred was to blend

itself with that of Hrolf and the Conqueror. It was impossible that the two peoples should henceforth be severed from one another, and their fusion proceeded so rapidly that the name of Norman had passed away at the accession of Henry the 2nd, and the descendants of the victors of Senlac boasted themselves to be Englishmen. Having thus briefly passed in review the sequence of events preceding the foundation of our Abbey, I think you will agree with me that we are greatly indebted to the good Bishop Anslem, whose wisdom and earnestness enabled him to stand, as it were alone, against Rufus, and to exercise a power and guidance over Henry, whose guardian he had been and whose education he had cultivated and thereby enabled him to win the title Beau Clerk. We can now fully understand the meaning of Henry, when in the Charter of our Abbey he says "I by the advice of my Bishop and other lieges."

There can be no doubt as to the true reason for his founding a monastery. His wisdom and foresight led him to follow rather than oppose the advice of his Prelate, and having made concessions to the Barons, he with true political skill, gave proof to the Church that the policy of his predecessors would be reversed by him, and as a result the Abbey of Reading was founded and endowed with a power and privileges hitherto unknown. And in this respect its FOUNDATION Charter is unique. It being the first religious House established on so broad and liberal a basis, and was the forerunner of the extended power given to other monasteries.

The revolution which events like this indicate was backed by a religious revival which forms a marked feature in the reign of Henry the First.

I do not therefore hesitate to claim for our Abbey on its foundation a political significance in the history of our country far greater than that which has been hitherto accorded by the writers of its history.

It may be interesting now to read the substance of the original charter :—

"Henry, by the grace of God, King of the English, and Duke of the Normans, to his Archbishops, Bishops, Abbots, Earls, and Barons, and to all Christians, as well present, as to come, Greeting :—Know ye, that three Abbyes were formerly destroyed in the Kingdom of England, their sins requiring it; *(peccatis suis exigentibus)*, that is to say, Reading, Cholsey and Lempster, which a lay hand has long possessed *(quas laica manus diu possedit)*, and has alienated and divided their lands and possessions; but I, by the advice of my Bishops, Clergy, and other Lieges, for the salvation of my soul and of King William, my Father, and of King William, my Brother, and of William, my Son, and Queen Maud, my Wife, and of all my ancestors and successors, have built a new Monastery at Reading, in honour and name of the Mother of God, and ever Virgin, Mary, and of the blessed John the Evangelist, and have given to the same Monastery, Reading itself, and Cholsey and

Lempster, with their appendages, with woods and fields, and pastures, with meadows and waters, with mills and fisheries, with churches also and chapels, and churchyards, and oblations and tythes, with money (a mint) and one monier, or coiner, at Reading. The Monks of Reading, their family (household) and effects, shall be free from all gelt and toll, and every other custom by land or by water, in passing over bridges and seaports throughout England. And the Abbot and his Monks shall have all hundreds and places, with soc and sac, and tol, and theam, and infangenthef, and utfangenthef, and hamsoken, within-borough, and without-borough, in ways and paths, and in all places, and all causes, which are or may be, from their men, and all their possessions, and from aliens forfeiting therein; and the Abbot and Monks of Reading shall, within all their possessions, have the whole cognizance of assaults, and thefts, murders, shedding of blood, and breach of the peace, as much as belongs to the Royal power, and of all forfeitures. But if the Abbots and Monks shall neglect to take cognizance of these things, the King may require it to be done, provided that he lessen not the liberty of the Church of Reading in any thing. And the men of the Manors thereabouts shall come to the Hundred Courts, at Reading and Lempster, according to the custom of former times; and if they shall refuse to come to justice, the King shall receive a forfeiture, and compel them to come, and to give satisfaction. He, who by God's favour should be canonically elected Abbot, must not abuse the Alms of the Monastery, by bestowing them upon his secular heirs, followers, or any other persons, but must take care to entertain the Poor, and Pilgrims, and Strangers. He must not sell the demesnes, nor make Knights, unless in the holy vest of Christ, in which he must take care, modestly, of entertaining Children,* but prudently to entertain adult and discreet persons, as well Clergy as Laity. To the Monastery of Reading, and all belonging to it, I give and confirm this freedom and immunity, which I recommend to the Kings that are to reign after me in England, for God's sake to be kept, that God may keep them for ever. But if any one shall, wittingly, infringe or lessen, or alter the design of this our donation, may the supreme Judge of all straiten him, and root out him with his posterity, that he may remain without any inheritance, in destruction and famine; but whosoever shall preserve the Monastery of Reading with the liberty and possession aforesaid, may 'the Most High, who reigneth in the Kingdom of Men,' establish him in all good things, and keep him for ever."

* This caution it would appear had become necessary at this period, there being many children under 15 years of age in monasteries, and were probably increasing in numbers. Fuller records, Book ii. p. 114, when the Danes massacred the monks of Crowland, "There was one child monk therein but ten years old, Turgar by name, of most lovely looks and person": his beauty saved him from the general slaughter. The custom was prohibited by bulls or charters of Honorius II. and Innocent II., the latter being addressed to Aucherius, second Abbot of Reading. Wollascott M.S. fol. 47.

Henry I. gave with no niggard hand. By this charter he conveyed, not only all his possessions in Leominster, to the Abbot at Reading, but he bestowed many privileges and immunities. He gave him and his Monks freedom from all gelt (or fine); from tol (of merchandise, on entering Town); he gave them also the privilege of soc (authority or liberty to minister justice, and to execute laws); of sac (a royalty or privilege, which a Lord of a Manor claims to have in his court, of holding plea in causes of debate, arising among his tenants and vassals, and of imposing and levying fines touching the same); tol (a liberty to buy and sell within anyone's own land); theam (a royalty granted to the Lord of a Manor for the having, restraining, and judging bondmen, and bondwomen, and villains, with their children's goods and chattels, in his court); infangtheof* (a privilege granted to the Lord of a Manor to judge any thief taken within his jurisdiction); utfangtheof (a privilege as used in ancient common law, whereby a Lord was enabled to call any man dwelling in his manor, and taken for felony in another place out of his fief, to judgment in his own court); hamsoken (the privilege of freedom, which every man has in his own house, and it also signifies the right wherewith the Lord of the Manor takes cognizance of the breach of that immunity). These privileges secured to the Abbot of Reading full government and plenary jurisdiction over the Town and community of Leominster, so that all writs for debt, or felony, all captures, and powers of imprisonment, were exclusively issued and exercised in the name and by the authority of the Lord Abbot of Reading.

The King gave also two other peculiar privileges to the Abbot of Reading: the one was a mint and monyer. This was probably a dangerous privilege, and was the source of much future trouble to the Abbot, for the Monks could not refuse to assist the exigencies of the crown, and thus were led into debts and difficulties. The other was the power of making Knights. This was the more remarkable as by a provincial council held at Westminster in the early part of his reign, this privilege of Abbots was abolished. The best account of this custom is contained in Dr. Hearne's Antiquarian Discourses, vol. 1., page 82-83. "Abbots made two sorts of Knights: the one superior, the other inferior. Those termed 'Milites' could not be common soldiers, for they were made with many ceremonies, and the greater the ceremony, the greater the honour. Thus Hereward, a nobleman, who long contended with William the Conqueror, was knighted by the Abbot of Peterboro, and William Rufus by Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury. Abbots could not make them '*nisi in sacra veste*,' which was their copes, for the adding more to the reputation of the receiver. Malmesbury in his life of Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, relates that about 3 of Henry I. it was by synod established '*ne abbates faciant milites*,' and that this liberty to make

* Infangentheof: from Saxon fang, or fangen; *i.e.* capere; theof, a thief. Utfangentheof: *i.e.* ut, or extra; fang, capere; theof, thief; Hamsoken: Saxon, ham domus; sok libertas. Tompkins' Law Dict.

Knights was a dispensation granted by Henry I. Other Knights of an inferior order were made by Abbots, who remained in the monastery, and waited upon the noblemen who visited the Abbot."

I cannot help recording one other gift of Henry to this favoured foundation, as it is so peculiarly "a sign of the times" in which he lived. "He gave them the hand * of St. James the Apostle, which his daughter Matilda, wife of the Emperor of Germany, had brought from that country with much care and ceremony; and he requires them to pay to it all the honour due to such a relique of such an Apostle." It may be worthy of remark, in further illustration of this matter, that King John gave command to the Abbot of Tewkesbury, to pay to the Monks of Reading, yearly, one mark† of gold, which should be enough to cover the palm of this hand of the Apostle.

Other favours and privileges are wont to flow in to those whom Kings delight to honour; and so Pope Innocent III. not only confirms all the privileges of this Royal Charter to the Abbots and Monks of Reading, but adds thereto favours of his own, for he grants this privilege to the Abbot of Reading and his Monastery, that when there shall be a general interdict‡ of the kingdom, they might celebrate the divine offices, though it shall be with closed doors, with bells silent, with low voice, and with the exclusion of any interdicted or excommunicated person.

That there was some religious foundation at Reading, which had the name of an Abbey, before the time of Henry the 1st, appears from the introductory words of the Charter, which mentions that the Abbeys of Reading, Cholsey, and Leominster, had all been destroyed for their sins, their possessions alienated, and their lands seized upon by laymen. The Abbeys of Reading and Cholsey were probably destroyed in 1006, when the Danes burnt Wallingford.

As the Abbey or Nunnery at Cholsey was founded by Ethelred, about A.D. 986, in expiation of the murder of his brother, Edward the Martyr, so the religious house at Reading was supposed to have been built by Elfrida, as an atonement for the same crime. The Abbey of Leominster is much the older institution, it having been

* See Lord Lyttleton's History of Henry I., vol. I., p. 383. Sciatis quod gloriosam manum B. Jacobi—Apostoli; quam Matilda Imperatrix filia mea de Alemannia rediens, mihi dedit ipsius petitione vobis transmitto et in perpetuum Ecclesiæ de Radingia dono: quare vobis mando quod eam cum omni veneratione suscipiatis, et tam vos quam posteri vestri quantum honoris et reverentiæ potestis sicut dignum est tantis tanti Apostoli reliquiis, jugitur in Ecclesiæ de Radingia, exhibere curatis. Dug. Monast: Matthew. Paris, 1684 ed., p. 79. Manus Sancti Jacobi—restituta est Radingiæ.

† Ego Joahnnes comes Moret seneschali suo honoris Gloucestriæ, Salutem. Præcipio tibi quod facias habere Monachis Raddingiæ singulis annis de redditu meo de Teokbir unam—marcam auri quam eis dedi ad manum. S. Jacobi co-operiendam. (Richard I. had taken off the gold from the hand of S. James, in his preparation for the Crusades.)

‡ Cum autem generale interdictum terræ fuerit, liceat vobis, clausis Janius, exclussis excommunicatis et interdictis, non pulsatis campanis, suppressa voce, Divina officia celebrare. Letter of Innocent III. Lord Conyngsby's M.S.S.

founded in A.D. 660, by Merewald, King of Mercia. This foundation, according to the custom of those days, was associated with miracles. The legend in this instance being that Ealfrid, a priest of Northumbria, coming to the court of Merewald footsore, faint and weary, in the evening, sat himself down, and taking bread out of his wallet, ate it. While in the act of eating, a lion appeared, who, on his offering him bread, mildly took it from his hand. The lion, according to the narrative, was typical of Merewald, who, on the teaching of Ealfrid, from a fierce Pagan, became a mild and forbearing Christian. This legend, according to some persons, gives the name to Leo-minster. Giraldus Cambrensis, speaks of the town as "Leonis Monasterium." It had, however, at this time, a totally different name, and, according to Camden, was called Llanlieni, which signifies a church of the nuns. Mr. Blount, a learned local topographer, gives as his opinion that its name is derived from Leofric, who was Earl of the Mercians, for in Domesday the name of the town is written Leofminster—*i.e.* the Minster or Church of Leof. There can be no doubt the first institution was established for monks, and that Ealdfrid, who converted the King to Christianity, was made the head, and that Woolpher, the royal brother of Merewald, succeeded him.

With regard to the situation of the Nunnery of Elfrida in Reading, I am inclined to the opinion that it occupied the site of St. Mary's Church, and that the dedication of the Minster and the Abbey are, in consequence, alike.

The Benedictines, to whom the abbey was given, were great builders and skilled in the selection of a site for their establishments, as the situation of all their monasteries amply illustrates, and in this respect they made no mistake in Reading. If we but picture to ourselves the situation freed from the impediments of surrounding buildings and railway embankments: it commands a splendid view of the surrounding country; the verdant valley of the Thames at its feet winding its course to Sonning, Shiplake, and Wargrave, with the Oxfordshire hills beyond, and on the south the Kennet valley and distant Hampshire hills.

The Benedictines took their title from S. Benedict, a native of Nuria in Italy, who was born about the year 480, and died in 543; he commenced in his boyhood a life of vigorous devotion and retirement, from which he reluctantly withdrew at the solicitations of the monks of the monastery of Sublaco to become their Abbot; he afterwards became the founder of a sect which rapidly spread over Europe. A zealous iconoclast, destroying the images as well as the temples of Apollo; the author of *Regula Monachorum*, a work which, according to the infallible authority of Gregory the Great, surpassed all other writings by the brilliancy of its style and the deepness of its wisdom; and a performer of miracles; he finally died with the reputation of being the Elisha of his period.

The costume of his order consisted of a loose black gown, with large wide sleeves, a scapulary, and a capuchin or cowl on their heads

terminating in a point behind; the gown and cowl were not worn indoors, and the under dress was composed of a tight suit of flannel, with stockings and shoes or boots covering the legs. The monks were obliged to perform their devotions seven times in twenty-four hours, the whole circle of their devotions referring to the passion and death of Christ. In Lent they dared not break their fast till just before sunset. They were not allowed to hold any private property of their own, and all their worldly possessions, which were furnished them by the abbot, consisted of their scanty allotment of clothes, a knife, a needle, a handkerchief, and a pen with tablets to write upon. The order was introduced into England by St. Augustine in the year 596, and if we date its dissolution at the death of Farringdon the 30th and last Abbot of Reading, its existence in this country will be found to have lasted 943 years.

The Abbot of Reading was called a Mitred Abbot, having a seat in Parliament, and took precedence next after those of Glastonbury and St. Albans. In the 49th year of Henry III., 64 abbots were summoned to Parliament, but these being afterwards thought too many to have seats in the House of Lords, Edward III. reduced them to 25, among whom the Abbot of Reading was included, and retained the privilege until the dissolution.

In addition to performing the regular offices of the church the monks were employed in transcribing books for the library, the missals and other offices used in divine service. They also kept the leger books* containing the transactions in the house; they had, moreover, particular persons among them appointed to take notice of and record the principal events that took place in the kingdom, which at the end of the year were digested and formed into annals.

The history of our Abbey, notwithstanding its extensive possessions and the many privileges and great powers it enjoyed, is not altogether free from instances of depression and difficulty, amounting in one instance to the sequestration of its revenues.

Swinfield, Bishop of Hereford, gives this very painful account:—"The number of the monks had not been filled up according to law, the divine offices were insufficiently performed, almsgiving was laid aside, the people of the town were excluded from their rights, and solemn contracts by which they had pledged themselves were disregarded."

This led to the remarkable intervention of royal authority, and to the sequestration by Edward I. of the revenues both of the monastery at Reading and of the cell at Leominster, into the hands of a layman. We give the writ at length:—

"Since this House is indebted in various sums to many creditors, to pay which it is quite unable (without the alienation of its goods) unless for a time at least, its expenses be considerably cut down; We compassionating the state of this House, and willing to provide a release from these burdens for those serving God therein, have taken

* See Man. pp. 266, 267.

into our own hands and under our own protection, as behoves us being Patron of the same, this same House, or Cell of Leominster belonging of full and undoubted right to the Monastery of Reading; and we have committed all its temporalities into the hands of our beloved Roland de Harlegh Knight, and have enjoyned him that he faithfully collect, and reserve, all the proceeds, revenues, and incomings of the said Cell, that he provide the Dean and Chaplains serving God therein with all things necessary for food and raiment, that he reserve alms for the poor and mendicant, according to the intention of the Charter of the said foundation. We will also that all unnecessary expenses in the house-hold as in other matters be cut off, and especially those referred to under our former Statute, 3 Edw. I., § ; and that the rest of the revenues, and incomings, be applied according to the arrangement made with the Abbot of Reading, and of those others, whom we have deputed to this purpose, to pay off the debt of the said House, and to be applied to no other purpose whatsoever. Witness the King at Gillingham, the 26th of December 1276."

This document affords convincing testimony to the fact that even in those days, there was a general control and supervision, over Ecclesiastical bodies, exercised by the Kings of England, and that in cases of extreme misconduct, the Sovereign could find means of asserting his Royal intervention and supremacy—in this case specially reserved in the Charter. This summary sequestration, however, gave rise to strenuous efforts at economy, and retrenchment. Nicholas de Quapelode, the Abbot of Reading, exerted himself to the utmost, to diminish the sums owing by the Monastery. He remitted within a few years of this sequestration, the large sum of £1227 (which his house had borrowed) to the Caorsini, who, with the Lombards, were the great money-lenders of the day; and he also paid to one Alexander, a merchant and citizen of London, all the moneys due to him, and to his partners, and he introduced a general strict supervision and rigorous administration of the revenues.

We must not, however, attribute all this state of general disorganization and misrule to the extravagance of the Abbot and Monks as individuals, but rather to the circumstances in which they were placed. It was the custom of the Nobility to look upon the larger Monasteries and to treat them as caravanseries or inns. They would, in moving from place to place, take up their abode at the Monastery for days together, with a large retinue of knights and retainers, and thus involve the Monastery in large expenses. * The Statute above

* Act of Parliament passed 3rd of Edward I. :—

"And because that Abbeys and houses of religion of the land hath been overcharged and sore grieved by the resort of great men and other, so that their goods have not been sufficient for themselves, whereby they have become greatly hindered and impoverished, and that they cannot maintain themselves, nor such charity as they have been accustomed to; It is provided that none shall come to eat or lodge in any house of religion of any other man's foundation than of his own, at the costs of the house, unless he be required by the Governour of the house, before his coming thither."

referred to was passed in restraint of this custom. The Abbots, having the privilege of coining money, were also engaged in direct monetary transactions, and frequently advanced large sums to the Monarchs themselves in moments of difficulty, and became in their turn the borrowers of large sums. The three Edwards in succession, at various times, were debtors in considerable sums to the Abbots of Reading; we must not, therefore, think too hardly of their conduct, or want of thrift apparently displayed.

Among the learned men that this monastery produced may be reckoned Robert of Reading, who, with Adelard of Bath, were the only two Englishmen in the early period of our history, who were famous for their knowledge of the Arabian language. They returned into England in the reign of Henry I. after they had spent several years in the East learning that language and translating books out of it into Latin.

Robert de Sigillo, made bishop of London in 1142, where he sat eleven years. Geofrey, of Magnaville, took him prisoner. Deceased in 1152.

William of Reading, archbishop of Bordeaux, born here in the reign of Henry III.

Friar John Lathbury, who at the dissolution of the Abbey in 1535 retired to Harborough, near Woodstock, where he was rector, and was afterwards promoted to the see of Bristol. By his last will dated the 4th of June, 1558, in which year he died, he gave to Winchester College the works of St. Augustine, St. Jerome, St. Cyprian, St. Cecil, Tertullian, Ireneus, &c., which were afterwards, for their better preservation, chained to the library there.

Leland found at Leicester a work written by Hugh, abbot of Reading, entitled *Questiones instar Dialogi.* "The Abbot," says Leland, "had a fair manor place of bricke, at Bere Court." Hugh Faringdon, the last abbot, seems to have preferred it for his country residence. In the east window of the chapel was his picture in stained glass, habited in his robes, and kneeling before a desk, with a book open upon it, out of his mouth proceeded a scroll inscribed with these words, "*In te Domine speravi.*" This house afterwards came into the possession of Sir Francis Englefield, but lapsing to the crown, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, it was disposed of as part of the manor of Pangbourne, and is now the property of the Breedon family.

LIST OF ABBOTS.

1. The first abbot was Hugh, the prior of Lewes; in 1129 he was made bishop of Rouen.
2. Ausgerus or Aucherius; he founded the hospital of St. Mary for lepers, near the great gate. See plan. He died in 1135.
3. Edward; who died in December, 1154.
4. Reginald; died February, 1158.

5. Roger; in 1163 the abbey church was dedicated by Thomas à Becket.
6. William, afterwards (1173) bishop of Bordeaux.
7. Joseph.
8. Hugh II. who founded a hospital, dedicated to S. Laurence, for the entertainment of the poor. In 1199 he was made abbot of Cluney.
9. Helias, 1213.
10. Simon; died 1226.
11. Adam de Lathbury, prior of Leominster; died 1238.
12. Richard, late sub-prior.
13. Adam; resigned 1249.
14. Adam II., sacrist of the monastery.
15. William, sub-prior of Coventry.
16. Richard; died 1261.
17. Richard de Radyng.
18. Robert de Burghare, 1287.
19. William de Sutton, 1305.
20. Nicholas de Quappelode, 1327.
21. John Appleford, 1360.
22. William de Dombleton, 1368.
23. John de Sutton, 1378.
24. Richard de Yately.
25. Thomas Earle, 1430.
26. Thomas de Henley, 1446.
27. John Thorne, 1486.
28. John Thorne II., 1519.
29. Thomas de Worcester.
30. Hugh Faringdon (Hugh Cook, of Faringdon).

In the year 1539, the ancient monastery of Reading, with its scarcely less famous Cell of Leominster, with all their rich endowments, was dissolved by attainder, in the 31st year of Henry VIII. It is not my business either to defend or to impugn the policy of those times, when "private greediness eadged by Churchmen, did grind the Church, and withdrew much from God; wherewith christian pietie had formerly honoured God."† I desire only to give as briefly as possible a narrative of facts.

Hugh Cook was the last Abbot of Reading, and John Glover was the last Prior of Leominster. They were both men who bent to the storm, and did what they could to conciliate rather than to resist. Hall in his chronicle says that "Hugh Cooke was a stubborn monk, absolutely without learning." This account is contradicted by those who must have known, and who had no motive in concealing or misrepresenting the truth. Dr. John London, the Visitor to the monastery appointed by the crown, writes of him to Lord Cromwell, "He desyreth only yr favour, and no other thing; and I know so much that my Lord shall find him as conformable a man as any in

† Camden's Britannia, p. 471, folio ed.

thys realme, as more at large I will shew you at the begynning of the term by the Grace of Godd." The same Visitor writes on another occasion, "I have requyred of my Lord Abbot the relycks of thys house which he schewyd unto me wt gudd will. I have taken an inventory of them, and have lokkyd them upp behynd the high aulter, and have the key in my keping, and they be always redy at your Lordeschip's commaundment. They have a gudde lecture in scripture daily redde in their Chapiter House, both in Englisch and Laten, to the wiche is gudde resort, and the Abbot ys at yt hymself."

The Inventorye off the relics off the House off Redyng :—

Imprimis.	Twoo peces off the Holye crosse.
Item	Saynt James hande.*
Item	Saynt Phelype scolle (skull)
Item	A bone off Marye Magdalene, with other more
Item	Saynt Anastasiais hand, with other more
Item	A piece off Saynt Pancrat's arme.
Item	A bone off Saynt Quyntyn's arme.
Item	A bone off Saynt Davyde's arme.
Item	A bone off Marye Salome's arme.
Item	A bone off Saynt Edward the Martyr's arme.
Item	A bone off Saynt Hierome, with other more.
Item	A bone off Saynt Stephen, with other more.
Item	A bone of Saynt Blaze, with other more.
Item	A bone of Saynt Osmonde, with other more.
Item	A bone of Saynt Ursula scole.
Item	A chawbone of Saynt Ethelwold.
Item	Bones of Saynt Leodigarye and off Saynt Heremei.
Item	Bones of Saynt Margarett.
Item	Bones of Saynt Arval.
Item	A bone off Saynt Aias.
Item	A bone off Saynt Andrewe and two pieces off his crosse.
Item	A bone off Saynt Fredyswyde.
Item	A bone off Saynt Anne, with many other.

† There be a multitude of small bonys, &c., which wolde occupie iiii schets of papyre to make particularly an inventorye of any part thereof. They be all at your Lordeschyp's commaundments."

* Canon Ringrose told me that he had this relic in his possession for some time, and that it was now (1872 or 1873) in the possession of Mr. C. R. Scott-Murray, of Danesfield.

† This latter part is in the writing of Dr. London, on the inventory sent to Lord Cromwell. Cotton M.S., Cleop. ed. IV., fol. 234, in the British Museum.

HISTORICAL EVENTS.

It will be impossible for me, within the limits of this paper, to give in the smallest degree an adequate account of the many important events which took place in this once celebrated Abbey. I will therefore only epitomise some of the more important in their chronological order as given by Coates and others whose accuracy I have in many instances examined.

HENRY I.

1121. The foundation of the Abbey.

1125. The first Charter granted* the Church being partially built.

1135. King Henry died at Bois-leon, near Rouen, Normandy, Dec. 2nd, his body, being embalmed, was brought over, and buried in the Abbey Church.

STEPHEN.

1140. After Christmas, King Stephen came to Reading.

1141. The Empress Matilda was here in the Rogation week, and was received with distinguished honours. Robert D'Oiley came to her, and agreed upon certain conditions, to deliver up his Castle of Oxford; in consequence of which agreement all the adjacent country fell into her hands.

HENRY II.

1156. William, eldest son of Henry II., died and was buried at Reading.

1163. This year was celebrated for an "Appeal of Battle" fought at Reading between Robert de Montfort and Henry de Essex, in the presence of the King and many of the nobility. Essex was defeated and left for dead. Permission being granted by the King to the Monks of Reading Abbey to inter the body, they conveyed it to the Abbey, when it was discovered that life was not yet extinct. The vanquished Knight ultimately recovered, and was admitted into the brotherhood and died a Monk.

1164. The Abbey Church† was this year consecrated by the Archbishop Thomas a'Becket, then at the very height of his power; and undoubtedly our Abbey was the scene of a

* Some historians assert that the Abbey was finished at this period, to wit, Matt. Paris says, "Ecclesia constructa est"; this, however, could not have been the case. Probably some portion was sufficiently advanced to admit of the brethren taking up their residence and conducting some kind of service while engaged upon the buildings.

† Even now the Church was not completed to its full extent, the Lady Chapel being added some years after the consecration.

most magnificent religious ceremony. The King himself, his chief officers of state, and other magnates of the realm being present to witness the first English Archbishop after the Conquest (and who afterwards became the most popular of English Saints) dedicate the fabric for ever to the worship of God.

1175. Reginald, Earl of Cornwall, a natural son of King Henry I., was buried here. During Pentecost King Henry kept his court and royal festival here.

1177. Henry II. kept his Easter here.

1184. A Synod* or Chapter of the suffragan Bishops of the province and of the Monks of Christ-Church, Canterbury, assembled here in the presence of the King, to elect an Archbishop in the room of Richard the Successor of Thomas a'Becket. It was adjourned to Windsor.

1185. Heraclius, Patriarch of Jerusalem, came to Reading, and had an audience of the King to solicit his aid against the Turks.

During the visit of the Patriarch to England he consecrated the Church of the Knights-Templars (The Temple Church, London).

RICHARD I.

1191. Richard Coeur de Lion held a Parliament here.

JOHN.

1206. John of Florence, legate of Innocent III. held a council here.

1213. Parliament held here.

HENRY III.

1227. The King kept his Christmas here.

1233. The Abbot granted a piece of land to the Franciscans for their friary at Reading.

1259. The pleadings of the Courts of Justice Michaelmas Term held this year at Reading, "before our lord the King himself"!

EDWARD I.

1276. The revenues of the Abbey sequestrated by the King.

1279. Archbishop Peckham held a council here.

1295. The King caused all monasteries to be searched and the money found in them to be taken to London, the Abbot of Reading being appointed collector for the diocese of Salisbury.

EDWARD III.

1337. The King borrowed jewels and other valuables of the Abbey.

1346. The King held a great justing at Reading after spending Christmas at Guildford.

* This event is of importance as it led to the establishment of the House of Convocation.

1359. John of Gaunt was married here to Blanche, daughter and co-heir of Henry Plantagenet, Duke of Lancaster, by a dispensation of Pope Innocent the Sixth.

RICHARD II.

1384. An assembly of Nobles, with the Mayor and Aldermen of London, was held here to inquire into and punish the seditious practices of John Northampton, late Mayor of London; whose insurrections however had been promptly checked by the spirited conduct of Sir Robert Knowles. Northampton was sentenced, in the presence of the King, to perpetual imprisonment and his goods confiscated. Richard Norbury and John More, two of the accomplices, were executed.

1389. The King and an assembly of Nobles met here.

HENRY VI.

1439. The Parliament held at Westminster was adjourned to Reading.

1451, 1452. } Parliaments held here.

EDWARD IV.

1464. The King having privately married Elizabeth, daughter of the Duchess of Bedford, during the time that a treaty was in progress for his marriage with the sister-in-law of Charles the Seventh of France, this marriage was kept secret for nearly half a year. About Michælmas the King held a council at Reading, and conducted the lady Elizabeth into the Abbey, where she was publicly led through by the Duke of Clarence and the Earl of Warwick, and acknowledged as Queen. During the same month Lord Maltravers, son of the Earl of Arundel, was married here to Margaret, the Queen's sister.

1466, 1467. } Parliaments held here.

HENRY VII.

1486. The King came to Reading about this time, and directed the alms-house for poor Sisters, "the house of S. John," to be converted into a Grammar School.

1508. For some years there had been disputes between the Abbot and Corporation or Guilds of Reading, which were finally settled this year.

HENRY VIII.

1509, 1526. } The King came to Reading in these years.

1529. The Queen Catherine came to Reading.

1539. Hugh (Cook) Faringdon, last Abbot of Reading, was executed with two of his Monks, Nov. 14.

READING ABBEY.

ITS ARCHITECTURE.

IN describing the Architecture of our Abbey it will be unnecessary for me to give any preliminary account of the rise and progress of the art and style of the period, but I will simply refer to the excellent paper prepared by Mr. Stallwood, read before this Society last session and published in our 1879-80 volume of Transactions, p.p. 15—33, and would recommend its perusal as a most fitting introduction to the consideration of the Architecture of our Abbey, for it is a most clear, comprehensive, and lucid essay on English Architecture of the Norman period, and embraces completely the time and style in which our Abbey was erected. The date of its foundation, 1121, is sufficient to show that its character would be of the middle and later Norman period, and this fact is fully borne out by the richness of many of the relics and choice bits of elaborately carved stone found from time to time belonging to the Abbey,—indeed there are still remaining, *in situ*, the base and a small portion of a shaft in the ruins of the chapel of S. Thomas of Canterbury, at the rear of the Roman Catholic Priest's house, bearing evidence of its elaborate enrichment, preserved from injury and in its almost original sharpness through being buried in debris for many centuries. I have found in different parts of the Abbey precincts, in excavating foundations and basements of buildings, many specimens of the most elaborate Norman carving. Drawings of some of these will be found among the illustrations accompanying this paper, and notably "The Reading Abbey Stone," which created quite a sensation on its discovery in January, 1835. I am thereby induced to give as an appendix a copy of a letter which was written to the Editor of *The Reading Mercury* by Mr. J. Wheble, F.S.A., and by the kindness of the Rev. Louis Hall I am enabled to illustrate by a drawing showing its present use as adapted by the celebrated architect, A. W. Pugin, to form the font in S. James' Roman Catholic Church. I think I may safely say that specimens of almost every form of elaboration, both in detail and carving, as described and illustrated by Mr. Stallwood, showing the richness of the best period of Norman work, have been found in Reading, among them that never-failing distinguishing feature, the zigzag moulding in great profusion and richness from around the more important arches of the edifice. This method of enrichment is supposed to have been intended for a representation of Glory, and it must be admitted that by catching the light at so many angles in succession, a sort of glittering effect is produced. The same idea seems to have struck the early engravers

in wood, who, in their rude cuts frequently represent the rays of the sun, and glory around the heads of the apostles, saints, and martyrs by a zigzag line; and stars in heraldry are defined in the same manner.

Perhaps this will be as proper a place as any to mention another circumstance alluded to by Mr. Stallwood which tends to prove that no buildings now existing in England can be much anterior to the Norman Conquest, viz:—an idea, which prevailed throughout Christendom during the tenth century, that on its completion our Lord's second advent would immediately take place. This idea, founded on an erroneous interpretation of a prophecy in the Apocalypse, so filled the minds of men with more and more awe as the century progressed, that not only were no works of consequence erected during it, but even those which existed already were neglected, and allowed to drop into a state of extreme dilapidation and ruin. They thought it would be useless if not profane, to erect magnificent buildings, the time being nearly arrived when, to use the sublime language of Shakspeare,—

> "The cloud-capt towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
> And like the baseless fabric of a vision,
> Leave not a wreck behind!"

This, however, is a digression, and in returning to the immediate subject of this paper I must remark that the time of indifferent building had passed when Reading Abbey was commenced, and not only was it richly ornamented but most substantially built, as the remains, though robbed of the casing they once had, are a monument of the soundness and substantial nature of the work.

Mr. Stallwood has pointed out the custom of the Normans first to lay out a general plan or put in the foundations of their larger buildings and then proceed with some one part to completion. This is evident from the fact that very often some parts of their buildings exhibit a further development of style. In the case of our Abbey we are by this fact enabled to judge how the time from 1121 to 1125 was occupied, the former year being the date of commencement and the latter the year of the first charter. My opinion is that the foundations generally were being laid and the buildings nearer to the river Kennett erected (the great kitchen, &c.), to serve for the accommodation and provisioning of the monks and others engaged on the buildings. They also established their mill and formed the course of the Holy Brook through the town from Coley during this period. And as it is probable that some inconvenience was felt in obtaining and conveying materials to the site, and considerable expense incurred in paying tolls and other dues, the charter was granted in 1125 to enable an Abbot to take up the work with vigour relieved of many inconveniences in prosecuting it, and endowed with great powers to facilitate its progress.

The Abbey covered a large space of ground. Not only had it a

large outer court—the Forbury—and an inner Court, wherein were situated the principal buildings, but it stretched far away toward Sonning, enclosing a well timbered park; the Abbey proper being built on a slight eminence on the bank of the river Kennet, and it commanded a beautiful view of the Thames. No pleasanter situation can be conceived. Its tower, the beauty of which may be conjectured from that of St. Lawrence, which was built by the monks of Reading, must have formed a striking object when seen from the neighbouring river.

I must now direct attention to the plan I have prepared with great care and accuracy from actual survey of the existing remains and records of foundations, I have from time to time collected from various sources, as well as from actual discovery, during the carrying out of several works under my direction within the precincts, over a period of 20 years. The plan has been laid down and printed in red on a reduced copy of the recent ordnance survey, so as to accurately show the relative positions of the ancient buildings with the existing modern ones. The Abbey precinct was surrounded with a thick and lofty wall, which may still be traced in the meadow below the county gaol, and traces of it were lately to be observed on the northern bank of the Holy Brook, when it was opened for the new drainage works. Its foundations were recently visible in a line with Blake's Bridge, where a new factory wall has been built. There were four entrance gates to the Abbey; one crossing the road to the chancel of St. Lawrence's Church, a second at the back of the "Saracen's Head" yard, on a spot now occupied by the Abbey Institute, a third led into the meadow close to the public-house in the Forbury called the "Rising Sun," and the fourth was close to Blake's Bridge. Each gate was battlemented, and two of them at least had dwelling rooms for the porter. The porter's lodge at the west gate by St. Lawrence's Church, consisted of a cellar, a hall, a buttery, three chambers, three garrets, a small yard, and garden, with an outhouse, and another tenement is mentioned containing a similar number of rooms, where the porter's lodge must have been situated at Blake's Bridge, or as it was anciently called The Orte Bridge. The surrounding wall, as will be seen by the plan, passed down Vastern Lane to a meadow called the Little Vastern. It then stretches eastward in a line with the Plummery wall, which is a part of it, and so to Blake's Bridge, then it ran along the bank of the Kennet, past the Abbey Mills, and was continued on the northern bank of the Holy Brook to the gate behind the "Saracen's Head" yard. The principal gate was probably, as it led directly to the great gate of the inner court, the gate by St. Lawrence's Church. Passing into the Forbury through this gate the visitor would have seen before him the great central tower and the west front of the monastic church, which was richly ornamented. On his right as he advanced would be the present Abbey gateway. As he emerged into the courtyard beyond the gateway he probably beheld on the right a small stone

house, the Hospital for Lepers, built by Aucherius, the second Abbot. These lepers lived entirely separate from the monks of the Abbey, had their regulations, and wore a distinct dress. The foundations of this building were dug out in building the new County Assize Courts. A plan taken by Mr. Clacey at the time showed it to be about 110 feet long and 50 feet wide, the largest apartment being about 60 feet by 45 feet. Three bodies were found to have been buried in the foundations. On the left hand, adjoining the gateway, was probably the Abbot's house. That this was its position seems to be conclusive from the mention of it in the survey taken in May, 1650, by order of Parliament, where mention is made of "two cellars, two butteries, a hall, a parlour, a dining room, ten chambers, a garret with a large gallery, and other small rooms, with two court yards and a large gatehouse, with several rooms adjoining the said house." I have been unable to find any trace of the foundations of this house though some were found when the house next the Abbey gateway was being built, but no record has been kept of them. Passing onward along "Abbot's Walk," the visitor would see on the left the entrance to the cloisters, across which a chain would be drawn. The cloisters surround a grass plat or garden, and occupied a space about 145 feet square (the present site of the gardens of the houses in Abbot's Walk). These cloisters were strewn with hay and straw in summer, and with rushes in winter. Stone benches ran along the sides which were covered with mats. The grass covered court or garden was the burying place of the humbler brethren, the Abbots and persons of greater consideration being buried in the cloisters, especially under the south and east cloisters. In the centre of the grass plat was the well of the monastery which still exists. The eastern cloister also exists. It was of course formerly covered, and opened into the chapter house, and had a great door at the north-east corner leading into the church, and also another door at the south. Over the west cloister was probably the dormitory, having a door, perhaps, leading into the church. On the south side of the cloister was the refectory, 167 feet long and 38 feet wide. Sir Henry Englefield describes it as ornamented with a row of intersecting arches. This room opened into the south cloister, and in the cloister are remembered two stone cupboards and between them a rough foundation, plainly the remains of the lavatory, which both at Westminster and Gloucester occupied a similar position. The west Cloister is also described by Sir Henry Englefield as standing 10 feet high in the whole length, with several doors in it, great and small. The chapter house is now (with parts of the eastern cloister) almost the only monastic room we can certainly identify. It still remains in its ruins a noble monument of the ancient magnificence of the Abbey. It is 44 feet by 79 feet, and was vaulted from wall to wall. It had a large entrance doorway from the cloisters with windows on each side and over. At the east end there were five large windows. The remains of the stone benches on which the

monks sat may still be seen along the wall on either side. Before its demolition it had, doubtless, seats at the east end for the Abbot, Prior, and Sub-Prior; and the vast windows were filled with stained glass and its walls painted with frescoes. Ashmole found much stained glass in the Abbot's Chapel at Bere Court, near Pangbourne, and the east end of St. Lawrence's Church was painted in fresco at great expense. On the north side of the chapter house there is a passage or slype which had an entrance from the cloister, and there was a similar one on the south side. The north passage is conjectured to be the revestry of the Abbey, where the vestments were kept, with an apartment over, which was probably the registry. There is one at Westminster in the same position. Out of the passage on the south side was a winding staircase, leading to a room above of the same dimensions.

That the kitchen was somewhere there seems to be matter of tradition, that part where the flower show is held being known as Kitchen End. The Parliamentary survey mentions that "there is on the east side of the Mansion House (*i.e.* the Chapter House) a great old hall, with a very large cellar under it, arched, and some other decayed rooms between the hall and the Mansion House, with the ruins of an old chapel, a kitchen, and several other rooms fit to be demolished." Sir Henry Englefield states that the dormitory was over the west cloister. I, however, am inclined to believe that this is the situation of the Domus Conversorum, and that the guests' rooms or dormitories were above. The dormitories of the monks being over their Hall and Locutorium, there were also a Fratery or Combination Room, and a Library or Scriptorium. In a map of Man's, on the site within what is now the prison garden, is marked "supposed ruins of the Castle," but that is conjectured to be the ruins of the infirmary, for there is evidence that there existed a firmary or infirmary there, that part being formerly known as Firmary garden. The garden of the monastery stretched from the present County Police Courts nearly to the Market-place. The stables, which were very large, are remembered as partly standing on a spot adjoining the Holy Brook, on the site of the Schools attached to King's Road Chapel, and adjacent premises; foundations of portions of these buildings were discovered when the new buildings were being erected, enabling me to get the exact width and the position of walls shewn on plan. With regard to the Church, Speed's map of 1610 conveys an inadequate notion of its appearance. What might be gathered from it is that it had a central tower, with a kind of pinnacle, surmounted by a cross, and that it had crosses on the east and west fronts. As before stated, it was a Norman structure, but was probably much altered from time to time. Powell, in his collection of materials for a history of Berkshire, speaks of the richness of the architecture of the Church, asserting that it was adorned outside and inside with interesting circular arches, and he compares it with Dunstable Priory, which was also built by Henry I., and of which

the two west doorways remain. That it was a large and magnificent church there can be no doubt. Its length was 450 feet, breadth, exclusive of the transept, 95 feet. The eastern Chapel was 75 feet by 50 feet; the choir 90 feet by 34 feet; the transepts 200 feet by 75 feet outside, and the nave 200 feet long. The central tower was about 45 feet square. These dimensions are from actual measurements of the remains and foundations as shewn on plan. They differ very much in some instances from those given by Sir Henry Englefield and Mr. Powell, who could not have traced the outline correctly without considerable excavations, which have since from time to time been made. The internal fittings of the church must have corresponded with the magnificence of its walls. The roof of the choir is said to have been of chestnut wood. The wainscoting of the choir was purchased by Magdalen College, Oxford, and is now the wainscoting of the hall.

APPENDIX.

THE READING ABBEY STONE.

The first account appeared in the columns of the Reading Mercury.

THIS interesting specimen of ancient Sculpture was discovered 24th of January, within the precincts of the ruins in the Forbury, and is well entitled to be denominated the *Reading Abbey Stone.* It consists of one square block of Oolite lime stone, and stands 20 inches high. The upper member, or abacus, forms a square of 27 inches, the surface of which is flat and unwrought. Each edge of the abacus is 5½ inches, and a deeply-cut, ornamented, chain-like pattern of stems and foliage, runs continuously along the four sides. There is, also, a circular hole of about 1½ inches diameter, and 4½ inches deep near the centre of each edge. Beneath the abacus, in recess 1¾ inches, is a species of fillet 2 inches broad, quite plain and *fresh-looking*, but bearing no traces of any former ornament. Below this plain fillet the stone presents the appearance, at each corner, of a square capital of a column (the central portion between being bevelled downwards and sunk back 5¾ inches, each squared corner is 9 inches at the upper part, and about 6½ inches at the necking, or inferior part, which is made circular, and which has capped and rested upon some shaft of stone in diameter 5½ inches, to which it was connected by the running in of lead, as is evident from the still remaining metal. These square capitals, and the receding parts between, have been exquisitely wrought with elaborate wreaths and intertwining knots. Two sides of this portion of the stone still retain the original design in minute detail and surprising conservation. The other two sides have unfortunately suffered from a rather cautious and *workmanlike* mutilation. The motive for this partial destruction of so beautiful a piece of carving is open to various conjectures. In the centre of the flat surface of the abacus, a mortice hole of 6 inches square penetrates downwards to the bottom, but two angles of the hole, to the depth of 2½ inches, have been rudely rounded off, thus affording some 11 by 9 inches of space there.

The purpose for which this relic of antiquity was originally destined when it was turned out of the mason's hands, with all its elaborate

tracery in beautifully varied yet symmetrical perfection, does not appear at this moment satisfactorily clear and obvious. That this work of art was highly prized at some period of time subsequent to its mutilation is most indubitably certain; nor could that period have been more recent, seemingly, than the era of the final building of the conventual Church itself, which was consecrated by Thomas a Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, A.D. 1164, as recorded by Mat. Paris.* For, the excavators having in the progress of their labours, passed across the North aisle of the Choir end of the Church, they came upon the perfect base of one of the great pillars. Here the men perceived that the floor, or rather the *grouting*, upon which the pavement (composed, probably, of ornamental tiles) had been laid, rose considerably above the floor of the aisle.† On penetrating downwards through this coat of grouting, about three inches thick, it appeared that there were two other coats, of nearly similar cement, before the natural soil was reached; the intervals being filled up with earth and sandy gravel, with the intention, no doubt, of preventing all damp from rising upwards into the Choir, as no vaults or crypts were underneath. But whether the three coats or layers of grouting were coeval with the building, or were found necessary at a posterior moment, may, perhaps, be ascertained on further investigation. However, a supposition is ventured that they formed part of the original plan, for the stone was scraped upon by the shovel, as the workmen cleared away the rubbish, accumulated by the demolition of the sacred edifice, from off the face of the uppermost layer of the grouting, but it was about 1½ inches lower than the surrounding grouted surface. (The whole floor is now full of inequalities.)

The attention of the persons in charge of the excavation was most properly aroused on seeing what at first appeared to be merely a flag stone, the utmost care and solicitude were excited at the sight of ornament, and the greatest caution was used in gradually exhuming this treasure. It was found to be in an erect position, *levelled* and squared, in a line taken East and West down the centre of the choir.‡ It rested upon a third or undermost layer of grouting, having pieces of tile, flint, &c., (to obtain the level) placed beneath the four capping neckings. But about two inches of a dark compost, formed of earth, argillaceous matter, and fine calcareous particles, had previously been laid upon this lowest grouting. With this same compost (which was not indurated, but rather moist) a wall of about four inches of flint,

* Paris says A.D. 1125, "ecclesia constructa est" the Church was built, and A.D. 1164, "Hoc anno dedicata est prius ecclesia, &c." this year the Church was first dedicated or consecrated, &c.

† The south aisle is now ascertained to have been likewise on a lower level than the Choir.

‡ In Man's history of Reading, p. 426, it is stated that a stone sarcophagus was discovered A.D. 1815, in the Nave. So close was that excavation, so very close to the spot occupied by the stone under description, that had the "searchers for gravel" but extended their delvings some few inches eastward, they must inevitably have disclosed this treasure.

pebble, and fragments of *tooled* stone had been raised round this precious deposit, as high up as the under edge or soffit of the abacus.*

This curious circumstance alone would have clearly evinced the degree of value set upon this stone at the time of its inhumation; but more worthy of remark yet, the wall just described was not deemed to be a sufficient protection and security for this once splendid specimen of art. Mutilated as it then was, some admirer of the arts,—some pious soul,—some venerator of things once dedicated to the honour and glory of the Deity, or appropriated to the decoration of His temple,—had carefully and devoutly filled up and cased over the whole mass (except the bottom part) with fine mortar or cement previously to its being committed to a frail and unpretending shrine.†

Could any similar block, whether of stone or of wood, ornamented or unadorned, have been serviceable to the forms of Catholic worship in the situation where this stone was discovered? It is thought not. To what use, then, was it originally intended to be applied? Not to indulge at length in useless theories and speculations; was it adapted to support in part a sarcophagus, or rather a slab on which reposed some recumbent figure? Could it have been the basement for a Holy Rood or Cross? or for a font? or a paschal candle? or a chaunter's desk?‡ Was it, in its primordial state of splendour, a portion of, and an ornament to, the monastery said to have preceded that erected by Henry, and to the total destruction of which the King alludes in his Charter of endowment? And are the so much to be regretted mutilations attributable to some ruthless marauders of those early days, or to the almost equally fatal domestic troubles of Stephen's reign? Why was it deposited, enveloped in all its cerements, in such curious concealment? Above all, why in the spot whence it has once again emerged to the light of day, for the gratification of all amateurs of the chaste, elegant, and exquisite designs exhibited in our early ecclesiastical architecture?

This treasure (for a treasure it is, though no longer bearing its primitive magnificence of decoration) is removed from Reading for the present.

* One or two fragments of bone and stained glass were observed round the wall. The square mortice hole on the top, and running to the bottom, was filled with a sort of rubbish quite dissimilar to that which was superincumbent on the surface of the upper grouting. The cavity was replenished with soft greyish pulverised particles of chalk or lime and bone, together with minute fragments of a blue slaty material, and some few small pieces of earthenware, like unto that known as Delf ware.

† When this casing came to be deliberately and carefully picked out, it was delightful to behold the freshness of the ancient colours,—black, white and red,—in many of the intricacies of the tracery.

‡ The moulding at the square central bottom part seems to preclude the idea of a capital to a clustered column.

These

"Remains
Of high antiquity, from waste escaped
Of envious man, and violence of war,"

are secured under the roof of

J. WHEBLE, F.S.A., and Mem. of the Reading Phi. Inst.

WOODLEY LODGE, *March 24th, 1835.*