# Bisham Abbey.

*By Ernest W. Dormer.*

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BISHAM ABBEY has always possessed a peculiar fascination for me since the day when I saw by chance its old mellow walls from the Thames some years ago. We had visited Marlow—a party on pleasure bent—and in the cool of the evening chartered a wherry and rowed quitely up the broad bosom of the Thames to inhale the sweet smell of new mown hay from the meadows and enjoy the sense of ease and luxury only procurable from such surroundings. As we progressed, turning a slight bend in the river there burst into view a sweet old palace of loveliness, a home of old English picturesqueness, peaceful in the extreme. A warm red glow suffused the time-worn walls and the setting sun reflected portions of the river scenes in the ancient glass of the windows. The Elizabethan gables and twisted chimneys from which the smoke was slowly curling, the hoary walls and old English garden, objects which particularly strike the roaming eye, added a charm to the building which one, whose gaze is accustomed to travel over stolid rows of masonry of the reconstructing, and we might say, destructive epoch, gazed on with unstinted admiration. Only one of the party knew it was Bisham Abbey, and a short account of its history was eagerly listened to by the remainder.

It was after such a passing brief visit to this home of antiquity that I endeavoured to probe its history. I found the field for research well trodden, but it mattered not so long as the glory and traditions of the past were unfolded. Bisham appeared in all its magnificence, the splendour of a royal home, redolent with the associations of those who lived and died when "Long live the King" was frequent, and chivalry at its height. It shone with a splendour of mighty men, valiant warriors who died in the lap of heroism, accomplished exponents of grace and refinement; and as each leaf of the past unfolded itself, there emerged from its old oaken rooms and tapestried chambers those flowery traditions and associations so treasured by all lovers of antiquity. Let me relate something of what my search brought forth.

The Manor of Bisham, Bustlesham, or Bysham Montague, as with all other Manors at the time of the Conquest, was at the dis-

posal of the Conqueror. He granted it to Henry de Ferrariis, whose grandson gave it in the reign of Stephen to the Knights Templars, who are supposed to have had a preceptory there. He also gave them the Mills called to this day Temple Mills. But the scandalous lives of this arrogant sect joined to an insupportable pride, soon caused them to be abhorred as much as they were esteemed at their institution, with the result that the combined efforts of Philip the Fair and Pope Clement V. were instrumental in bringing about the ruin of the whole community. In the year of their suppression, 1312, Bisham was granted to the kindred religious and military order, the Knights Hospitallers or the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem. Their tenancy seems to have been of a very temporary character, for the Manor was successively in the possession of Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, Hugh Despencer and Ebulo l'Estrange before it reverted to the Crown, and was granted by Edward III. in or about the year 1335 to William Montacute, Earl of Salisbury. At a later period, the King granted the Earl a license to establish a Priory there for Benedictine Monks of the Order of St. Augustine. The establishment was endowed with lands which produced a revenue of £285 per annum. During the next two hundred years the history of Bisham is shrouded in uncertainty, and the only events which seem to shine from the gloom to illumine the Abbey are the burials of several illustrious personages beneath its roof. Here lie interred the following :—

William, Earl of Salisbury, son of the Founder of the Priory.

John, Earl of Salisbury, who was slain at Cirencester, and whose bones were removed to Bisham to repose among those of the great family who had gone before, by Maud, widow of Sir John, by license specially granted by Henry V. The story of the death of John, Earl of Salisbury, is as follows :—

When the conspirators had taken false news to the Queen Isabella, who lay at the village of Sonning, virtually in imprisonment, they spread a false report that King Richard was in Yorkshire at the head of 100,000 men. This statement was given out to avoid the King and to approach Wales from whence they expected an alliance, Richard being very popular in that country. Having encamped at Cirencester, the four Generals took up their quarters in the town, while the army encamped without. The Duke of Surrey and the Earl of Salisbury lodged at one inn and the Duke of Exeter and the Earl of Gloucester at another. Their little experience having

caused them to neglect to set a guard at the gates, the Mayor of the town, a man of sense and courage, took advantage of their negligence to strike a signal blow for his side. He secretly drew together in the night four hundred townsmen, and having ordered the gates to be shut he divided his followers into two companies and attacked at once the two inns where the four generals were lodged. The surprise was complete. Although the lords had none but their servants with them, they defended the house and themselves the greater part of the night. During the conflict some one on the Earl of Salisbury's side suggested setting fire to a neighbouring house at the rear, thinking this diversion would cause the townsmen to leave them to extinguish the flames, and by this means give the two generals a chance to escape. Unhappily for the besieged the stratagem had quite a contrary effect. The townsmen irritated beyond measure by the action, redoubled their efforts, and at length broke open the inn defended by the Duke of Surrey and the Earl of Salisbury. The strength of the two lords was very much exhausted, and being severely wounded, little resistance was offered to the townsmen, who at the command of the Mayor, beheaded the Duke and Earl on the spot. The other two generals fared a little better. They managed to escape from a garret over the tops of the house and get out of the town with the help of a few trusty townsmen, only to find their army gone and the camp deserted. They soon after lost their heads on the scaffold.

THOMAS, EARL OF SALISBURY. This was the leader of the great army which besieged Orleans in 1428. It appears that the Earl came by his death in an unfortunate manner. The English had extinguished the flames which their enemies had kindled and lodged themselves in the town. At the same time they became masters of a large tower on the bridge whence they could overlook the whole city. The taking of this tower proved fatal to the Earl, for one day as he was looking out from a window, a cannon ball from the city hit him as it passed on the right side of his head, carried away his cheek and struck out one of his eyes. He was removed to Melun, but died a few days afterwards, and his body was brought to England, and buried at Bisham Abbey. His death occurred on the 3rd November, 1428. He left no male issue, but one daughter, who was married to Richard Neville, son of the Earl of Westmoreland, who, upon the death of the Earl of Salisbury, became the next Earl of that house.

*(To be continued.)*