ON THE ALIEN PRIORIES IN THE ISLE OF WIGHT, AND THEIR SEIZURE BY EDWARD THE FIRST.

By the Rev. E. VENABLES, Precentor of Lincoln.[1]

THE Alien Priories of England, during the three or four centuries of their existence, were a standing, and at times, a very inconvenient memorial of the subjugation of the country by a foreign power. The fact of the Norman Conquest was stamped, as it were, on the face of the land, long after our Sovereigns had become Englishmen, by these little settlements of aliens dotted everywhere over it, owing allegiance to a foreign Monarch, paying obedience to a foreign Monastic House, and transmitting the greater part of their rents and profits to their spiritual heads beyond the seas. When England had been only recently brought under the Norman yoke, and the larger part of her territory was held by Norman lords, and her kings were far more Norman or Angiovine than English, these *Alien Priories*—by which, as is well-known, we understand cells appurtenant to the great foreign Religious Houses, from which they commonly received their Priors, and in most cases their Monks, and to which they returned their receipts—presented nothing that appeared at variance with a sound national policy, and little that could be distasteful to the national mind. It was only a reasonable arrangement that when a benefaction of land or tithes was made to any one of the French monasteries by a Norman lord, an offshoot of their establishment should be planted on the estate, in order to secure the profitable cultivation of the land, and the faithful transmittal of the rents and revenues. In fact, the Prior and Monks of an alien priory were little more than the stewards and servants of the larger house, owing their existence, as a corporate body, rather to the temporal advantage of the mother-monastery than to the spiritual benefit of the district in which it was founded.

To take an example from the district now before us—

[1] Read in the Historical Section of the Southampton Meeting, August 7, 1872.

the Isle of Wight. The Abbey of Lire,[2] in the diocese of Evreux, was founded by William Fitz-Osbern, the early friend and zealous coadjutor of Duke William of Normandy. To him, on the Conquest of England, among other large possessions, William granted the lordship of the Isle of Wight. Still Norman at heart, Fitz-Osbern availed himself of this grant to enrich his Norman abbey. This he endowed not only with the tithes of six of the largest of the island parishes, Arreton, Freshwater, Godshill, Newchurch, Niton and Whippingham, but also with lands. These lay in various parts of the island, but chiefly in and about Carisbrooke, his own feudal fortress. There, on the hill over against the castle, Fitz-Osbern founded a small religious house —not yet needing to be characterised as an *alien* priory— with a prior and a handful of monks, under whose superintendence, if not by their own actual labour, the land was to be cultivated, and who, after discharging the cost of the maintenance of the house, were to be accountable to the Abbot of Lire for the profits of their farming. A later example is afforded by the little priory of Appuldurcombe, which was founded by Isabella de Fortibus, Countess of Albemarle, towards the latter part of the reign of Henry III., with the object of securing the revenues of the manor to the Abbey of Monteburg, in the diocese of Coutances, founded by Richard de Redvers, her ancestor, in 1090. Of the two remaining alien priories in the Isle of Wight, St. Cross and St. Helens, we know little or nothing. St. Cross was a cell of the Cistercian Abbey of Tiron, in the diocese of Chartres; St. Helens a cell of a house of Cluniac monks, whose name has not been discovered.

But with the lapse of time and the entire change of relations between the two countries, a complete change of feeling towards these foreign colonies sprang up, and the members of the alien priories came to be regarded with jealousy and dislike as interlopers. When the provinces of France in which the chief monasteries were situated ceased to recognise the King of England as their sovereign, and he had ceased to have any beneficial interest whatsoever in

[2] The site of this monastery in its Latinised form gave his name to the celebrated Biblical Commentator, Nicholas de Lyra, who was born at Lire of Jesuit parents, about A.D. 1290. He is the "Lyra" of the well-known lines, alluding to him as a precursor of the Reformation,—

"Si Lyra non lyrasset
Lutherus non saltasset."

them, it was natural that the existence of these minor houses, drawing their sustenance from the estates with which they had been endowed and transmitting it to a foreign land, should be regarded as a grievance. This feeling would be exasperated to one of decided hostility when the two countries were at war with one another. Our kings would most excusably look upon it as an anomaly no longer to be tolerated, that the resources of their kingdom should be drained by these religious colonists for the benefit of their enemies, and would take measures to check so great an evil. The alien priories might not unreasonably be regarded with suspicion, as little nests of traitors, centres of sedition and disaffection, availing themselves of their position to obtain and furnish information to the king's foes, and capable, when opportunity offered, of doing some serious mischief to the king and his realm. This suspicion might be often quite unfounded. Many, perhaps the majority, of the alien priories were little humble establishments,—at Appuldurcombe there were but a prior and two monks, and only a prior and one monk at St. Helens and St. Cross,—quietly tilling their ground and performing their religious duties without thought of conspiring against the sovereign of the land. But the apprehension awakened was so reasonable, and the fact of the revenues of English estates being regularly sent to France to nourish the king's enemies so shocking to national feeling, that we cannot be surprised that among the first consequences of warlike relations between the two countries, was a sweeping edict relating to these alien priories. Their property was taken into the king's hands, their estates were managed by the king's officers, and in the case of those whose houses were situated near the sea-coast, and who might, therefore, hold treasonable communication with the enemy, or facilitate their descent on the country, the religious themselves were removed to a less suspicious locality in the interior.

The documents I have the pleasure of introducing to your notice have reference to the earliest instance of this stern dealing with the alien priories. If such harsh measures were justifiable anywhere, they were certainly so in the Isle of Wight. No part of our coasts needed more careful guarding. In the occupation of a hostile force the Island would prove a source of weakness and distress. The Danes had

found it a most convenient naval fortress from which their ships made descents on the Southern shores of England, and to which they returned to enjoy their booty. Were the French to become masters of so strong a position, the injury to the realm would be incalculable. How, then, was it consistent with the safety of the kingdom to suffer Frenchmen to draw the rents of estates, or even to permit them to continue as residents in so important an island?

No sooner, therefore, did Edward I., in the year 1294, find himself not unwillingly drifting into a war with France, than we find him issuing the writ now before us, directing that all the priories "de terra et potestate Regis Franciæ" in the kingdom, together with all their lands, tenements, goods, and chattels, "should be taken into the king's hand, and that in the case of the Isle of Wight priories, in common with those near the sea-coast generally, the priors and their monks should be removed to the interior of the country." [3]

It may be convenient that we should here give a glance at the events of this stormy period. An uncomfortable feeling had been for some time growing up between the maritime population of the two countries. Piratical descents, followed by severe reprisals, became frequent on both sides. The mariners of the Cinque Ports in 1292 made a hostile attack on the coast of Normandy, and the following year ravaged the whole sea-board of France. In 1295 the French landed at Dover, and were not beaten off till they had inflicted great damage; while in the next year, 1296, Prince Edmund ravaged the French coast, and captured the city of Bordeaux.

The indignation of Philip IV. had been roused by the conduct of the seamen of the Cinque Ports, and in 1293 he had summoned Edward, his vassal, to answer for the misdeeds of his subjects. This summons Edward had treated with contempt, and in the following year, the date of the

[3] Tanner (Notit. Monast., Preface, pp. vi, vii), when speaking of this precautionary measure, places it two years too late, the twenty-fourth year, 1296, instead of, as we see from the writ before us, the twenty-second year of Edward I., 1294: "The king," he writes, "in the twenty-fourth year of his reign seized all the alien priories during his wars with the King of France, and removed all the alien monks twenty miles from the seaside, that his enemies in France might have no assistance from them." In 1339 we find an order of Edward III. for the removal of the prior and monks of Appuldurcombe to Hyde Abbey, near Winchester. Worsley, *Appendix*, No. lxxix.

writ, authorising the confiscation of the alien priories, Philip declared the fief of the king of England forfeited. Edward renounced his fealty to the French crown, and conscious that this could imply nothing but open war with France, he took active measures to prepare himself for the conflict by raising forces at home, protecting his coasts with armed men and defensive works, and strengthening himself by foreign alliances, especially that with Flanders.

It is to this period that the two documents belong that are now in the Public Record Office, London; and which, through the kindness of my friend, Mr. Burtt, I have the opportunity of bringing before you, relating to the confiscation of the property of the Alien Priories in the Isle of Wight. They both travel over pretty much the same ground, and contain, to a considerable extent, the same particulars. The earlier of the two comprises the account rendered by Richard of Afton,[4] of the property, real and moveable, of the five Alien Priories, viz., Carisbrooke, St. Helens, St. Cross, and Appuldurcombe, which, in compliance with the writ of 1294, in the month of August, 1295, he had taken into the king's hands, and delivered over to Simon Stake, on the 17th of the following November: together with a detailed report of the defensive works executed by him and Gilbert of Arden, the inspector of such works, for the protection of the coast of the Island "against the King of France and other the king's enemies." The second document is an Inquisition taken by the aforesaid Simon Stake on the Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday following the Feast of St. Clement, November 23rd, and the subsequent Monday, A.D. 1296, of the goods and chattels of the five priories we have named, seized for the king by the above-mentioned Richard of Afton and Gilbert of Arden. The returns are made on oath by seven witnesses, "juratores." Among these we may notice the name

[4] Afton is a manor in the parish of Freshwater. It had belonged to Earl Tosti; but at the time of the Domesday Survey was in the king's hands. The family that took its name from the manor was one of the most considerable in the Island in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Two of the family, Robert and William of Afton, made grants of the tithes of the fisheries to the Abbey of Lire. Richard of Afton, the maker of this return, appears repeatedly as a confidential agent of the lady of the island, Isabella de Fortibus, the steward of whose household he was; and it is inferred by Worsley, from a variety of circumstances, that he promoted the sale of the lordship of the island to Edward I. This sale was effected for 4000*l.* at Stockwell, in Surrey, Nov. 12, 1293, when Isabella was on her death-bed. In 1295, the year of this return, Richard of Afton was associated with Sir Adam Gourdon in the Wardenship of the island.

of Henry of Oglander, a member of a family which from the time of Henry I. to the present day has without a break held a leading place in the Island; Russell, of Yaverland, the ancestor of the noble house of Bedford; Evercy of Standen, together with the humbler names of John the Forester, Adam the Carpenter, Adam the Tanner, &c.

The form of the reply of the jurors is in every case the same. They first assert ignorance of the removal of any treasure in gold or silver, or of any debts due to the prior. They then proceed to state that on a certain day Richard of Afton and Gilbert of Arden entered the priory, expelled the prior and his brethren, and took possession of their goods and chattels, of which they proceed to furnish a priced inventory. We have a similar inventory in the earlier document, Afton's return containing a few additional particulars of some interest. For instance, we find that by the king's command the palfrey and sumpter-horse belonging respectively to the prior of Carisbrooke, and the proctor of the Abbey of Lire (employed to collect the tithes, rents, and dues belonging to that abbey in the Island), together with the prior's white horse, and the horse of the prior of St. Cross, were returned to their owners; and that at Carisbrooke the military equipment with which each house was provided, "ad salvacionem terræ," was also restored.

The first item in Afton's account is, in each case, the money received from the debts due to the houses, together with the tithes and the rents of their tenants. This is followed by the inventory of agricultural stock and produce, corn and other grain, horses, oxen, and cows, sheep and lambs, wool, cheese, geese, chickens, &c. This is succeeded by an account of the expenses of working the land, repairs of buildings, &c.; and, lastly, by the articles of military furniture belonging to each priory. The second return corresponds in the main with the first; but being simply a return of goods taken into the king's hands, there is no account of expenses.

One leading point of interest in these documents lies in the evidence they afford of the state of agriculture and the stock of a farm, and of the prices of ordinary farm produce, at the end of the thirteenth century. We see that as Professor Thorold Rogers[5] has remarked, the same kind of

[5] History of Agricultural Prices, i. 326.

stock which is now kept on an English farm was kept five or six hundred years ago. Oxen and cows, horses, pigs, sheep, and poultry, were reared on these Isle of Wight farms in the days of Edward I. just as they are now. The first thing that strikes us in examining the returns is the small number of horses that were kept on these farms. Excluding the riding and pack horses, we find only ten used for agricultural labour. Of these, six were "affri" or "stotts," *i.e.*, coarsely shaped small horses, able to subsist on the poorest fare, and do the commonest drudgery, still common in country districts. The average price of "affri" in 1269, as given in Professor Rogers's elaborate and painstaking work, quoted above, was 6*s.* 9*d.* One at St. Neots, in 1275, is set down at the unprecedented price of 19*s.* 9½*d.* A common price was 10*s.* The three "affri" belonging to St. Helens are valued a little below this—at 5*s.* each; while the three at Appuldurcombe are not priced at more than 20*d.* each—sorry drudges we may conclude they were. The cart-horses, "equi," at Appuldurcombe and St. Cross stand at 20*s.* The prior of Carisbrooke was a grander gentleman than any of his Island brethren, and boasted of a riding-horse, "palfridus," of his own, valued at 4*l.* 13*s.*, and a pack-horse, "equus summarius," for his luggage, valued at 1*l.* He also had a white horse, worth 10*s.* The proctor of the Abbey of Lire, who made his home in the same priory, was similarly equipped, his horses being valued at 2*l.* 6*s.* 8*d.* and 13*s.* 8*d.* respectively.[6]

Only three bulls appear in these returns; at Carisbrooke, Appuldurcombe, and St. Cross, and, as usual, they are cheap; the first valued at 10*s.*, the other two at 5s. This nearly agrees with Professor Rogers's average for this year, viz., 6*s.* 9d. Cows appear in a tolerably large number—52. Of these twenty-six are noted as unsound, "debiles," and therefore priced lower, viz., 4*s.* a head; the others are valued at 6*s.* at Carisbrooke, where the stock generally was evidently of a superior kind and better kept, and 5*s.* elsewhere. This is

[6] To illustrate these prices, I may mention that Earl Clare, in 1284, purchased a black horse for 3*l.* 13*s.* 4*d.*, and a palfrey for 5*l.* 6*s.* 8*d.* When a riding-horse was needed in 1303, for the use of the warden of Merton College, one was bought by the College at Aylesbury for 6*l.*; while, in 1363, when a hack was required by the Provost of Queen's, to carry him to Avignon on the business of his College, one was purchased for him for 2*l.* 10*s.* The horses bought for the use of Edward II., in the first year of his reign, range in price from 6*l.* 6*s.* 8*d.* to 2*l.*

considerably below Professor Rogers's average, viz., 8*s.* 10¼*d.* The young oxen, or bugles, "boviculi," used for draught, number twenty-four, and run from 4*s.* 6*d.* to 3*s.* a head; the calves, twenty-six, running from 3*s.* 4*d.* to 1*s.* The number of pigs kept is in accordance with the importance of the animal in mediæval economy, when salted meat was necessarily the almost exclusive fare during half the year. The readiness with which pork takes salt, and the nutritive power it preserves after curing, marked it out as the most suitable flesh meat for storing for the supply of the table during the winter. We find as many as 110 pigs, "porci," and 68 sucking or young pigs, "porcelli;" besides four designated as "hogs," and six as "sows." The largest number, viz., 82, was, as we should expect, kept at Appuldurcombe, where the woods, in which they could pick up mast and acorns, were the most extensive. The price of pigs is either 2*s.* or 1*s.* 6*d.*; below the average of the year, viz., 2*s.* 6½*d.*; and of the "porcelli," 6*d.*

The Isle of Wight has been, at all times, famous as a sheep country. The mildness of its climate renders it a very favourable district for early lambs, the flocks being almost entirely free from the casualties they are exposed to in more northern and severer parts. The whole number returned in the accounts before us, including 206 wethers, muttons, "multones;" 323 ewes, "oves matrices;" 166 lambs; and 4 rams, "hurtardi," amounts to 699. The downs of Appuldurcombe, then as now, fed the larger proportion, 403. Whether by oversight or not, only lambs, 106 in number, appear in the Carisbrooke return. The prices run from 8*d.* to 1*s.*

The Island wool has been long celebrated for its fineness. "Not Lemsters self can show a finer fleece," writes Drayton. At the period of this return, 1204–6, the price of wool was, from some unexplained cause, suffering from a depression unparalleled till the year that followed the Black Death of 1348. The wool at Carisbrooke is noted as "debilis," and is valued at only 40*s.* a sack, *i. e.*, 1*s.* 3*d.* a petra, or stone. At Appuldurcombe it was slightly higher = 1*s.* 6*d.* a stone. Some of the prices given by Professor Rogers, this same year, are :—Farley, 1*s.* 1*d.* and 1*s.* 2*d.*; Gamlingay, 2*s.* and 1*s.* 9½*d.* The quantity is but small—3 sacks at Carisbrooke and 4 pisæ 5 petræ, *i. e.*, about 2⅓ sacks at Appuldurcombe.

Professor Rogers remarks[7] on the difficulty affecting an inquiry into the price of wool in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, from the extraordinary variations in the number of pounds contained in the *petra*, or *stone*. He speaks of no less than thirteen of these variations, and in some cases two or even three recognised in the same locality, *e. g.*, a petra of 7 lb., 14 lb., and 16 lb. used at Gamlingay. In this case, at least at Appuldurcombe, we can determine the weight of the petra with tolerable accuracy. The return specifies that 10 *petræ* go to a *pisa*. Now a pisa was half a sack; and if we regard the sack as containing 52 cloves, or 364 lb., the petra would amount to one thirty-second part, or $11\frac{3}{8}$ lb.

Poultry is found only at St. Helens and Appuldurcombe—10 ducks and 12 chicken at the former, and 80 chicken at the latter, all at 1*d.* a head; about the usual price at the period of which we are speaking.

Turning now to agricultural produce, we find the entire return amounting to $216\frac{1}{2}$ quarters of wheat, 107 of barley, 59 of oats, and 20 of drage, a grain pronounced by Professor Rogers to be "clearly of the same character with barley, and frequently malted." The year of the return was one in which "prices had fallen considerably; but wheat was uniformly dear, barley a little below the proportion, and drage still less; oats rather cheap."[8] The prices in the Isle of Wight are somewhat lower than the averages given by Rogers:—wheat, 6*s*., average 6*s*. 9*d*.; barley, 4*s*., average 4*s*. 4*d*.; oats, 2*s*., average 2s. $4\frac{3}{4}d$.; drage, 3*s*., average 3*s*. $2\frac{5}{8}d$. There are returns of two pounds of malt, "braseum," and "cursal," or "scurril-braseum," of inferior grain. The better kind was priced at 4*s*. at Carisbrooke, and 6*s*. at Appuldurcombe; the average for the year being 7*s*. $1\frac{3}{8}d$., and the inferior, 2*s*. Its badness may be inferred from its falling so much short of the average—5*s*. $3\frac{3}{8}d$.

The only other articles of agricultural produce occurring in the inventory are sides of bacon, "bacones," of which we have 7 at Carisbrooke, valued at 2*s*. each, "quia debiles;" cheese, two "pondera," *i. e.*, weys of 2 cwt., at the same Priory, priced together at 16*s*.—below the average of

[7] Hist. of Prices, i. p. 367.

[8] Ibid i. p. 192.

9*s.* 2½*d.* the wey; and 25 lb. of "cepum—hard suet for making candles—at 1*d.* a pound.

Allusion has already been made to the articles of military equipment entered in these returns. I take it such would have been found in larger or smaller numbers in every religious house during these stormy periods, when personal violence was so rife. But they would be especially necessary in establishments lying so near the sea-board, and in a district so peculiarly liable to, and, in point of fact, so constantly suffering from hostile descents as the Isle of Wight. The military furniture at Carisbrooke may be given as a type of the whole. The inventory comprises a breastplate, a hauberk, one corslet, a pair of iron shoes, an aketon (a coat of mail), two lances, and a pair of "treppæ."[9] The monastery of St. Cross contained a crossbow with its quarrels; those of St. Helens and Appuldurcombe two pairs of mustelers.[1]

The profits of the Abbey Mill also appear in the Carisbrooke account.[2]

The St. Helens return contains several curious items. This diminutive establishment supported a vicar to serve the parish church, and an English monk with his boy, "garcio." The wages of this monk amounted to 17*s.* for seven weeks and two days, being at the rate of 4*d.* a day. His name was Fremond. He was of Wenlock Abbey in Shropshire, and appears to have had a great capacity for running the priory into debt. He had pledged a piece of cloth of gold, "baudekinum deauratum," to the Vicar of St. Helens for 60*s.* "ad commodum domus Sanctæ Helenæ;" and was also indebted to Roger, the parson of Brading, for a quarter of wheat, two quarters of pulse, a quarter of barley, and one of vetches, and 15*s.* to John le Saglier of Southampton for wheat bought of him. Other burdens lay on this little Cluniac house. The prior had sold a livery to a certain Herneburgha de Makingham for 30 marks of silver, which sum he had carried away with him to France when

[9] Probably for "trappæ," the coverings of horses. In the "Romance of Richard Cœur de Lion," of the fourteenth century, we read:—

"A messenger ther come rydand
Upon a stede whyt so mylke,
His trappys wer of tuely sylke,
With five hundred belles ryngande."
(p. 60).

[1] "Mustilers." In "Statutes of the Realm," vol. i. p. 231, under "Statuta Armorum" is this passage: "E qe tuz les baneors qe baners portent, seent armes de mustilers, e de quisers, e de espaulers, e de bacyn, sans plus." The word is there translated "mufflers." It may have been a kind of body-armour.

[2] "Item de exitu moture molendini de viij. septimanis, j. quarteriam dimid' mancorn, precium quarterii v^{s}."

he left this Island in obedience to the ordinance of the king, to the very great injury of the house, "ad maximum dampnum domus." Another right to a livery for himself as a monk, "ut monachus," and his servants, was enjoyed by Richard le Estur,[3] the vicar of the parish, whose wages, including those of his "serviens," were 3*d.* a day. The establishment of this little house, maintained at the conventual table, consisted of three lads, "garciones," belonging to Richard the vicar, and Fremond the monk, one shepherd, "bercarius," one mower, one "daye," dairykeeper, and three footmen, "pedones," the cost of whose maintenance for six weeks amounted to 73*s.* 6*d.* When the property was taken into the king's hands, the whole establishment seems to have been broken up. The Prior, as we have seen, went to France, 13*s.* 4*d.* being paid him for travelling expenses; the English monk went to Carisbrooke; and the vicar and his dependents received their wages, and with Herneburgha of Makingham, a compensation for their livery from the king's exchequer.

The wages of the Prior of St. Cross were at the rate of 3*d.* a day. These were only paid for five days; and as wages were paid to an English monk from the Feast of the Assumption to that of St. Edmund the King, amounting to 24*s.* 6*d.* for himself and 8*s.* 2*d.* for his "garcio," the Prior of St. Cross, like his brother of St. Helens, must have had notice from the king to quit the realm.

It appears that the Prior of Carisbrooke had granges at Shete and at Chale; and that the Prior of Appuldurcombe had a provost, "præpositus," at Swainston, and a reeve at Brighston.

The concluding portion of the earlier document supplies us with a detailed account of the money received by Richard of Afton for the execution of the defensive works of the island, "for fortifying, defending, and safely keeping the Isle of Wight against the King of France and other the king's enemies." The items include entries for felling timber, quarrying stone, the formation of walls, ditches, barriers, and brestages, the wages of carpenters and masons, the construction of three warlike engines and four springalds, with the charges of an immense number of footmen and horsemen, of horses

[3] A member of the ancient family seated at Gatcombe, descended from one of the chief landholders at the time of the Domesday survey.

armed and unarmed, ("cooperti" or "discooperti") cross-bowmen, messengers going and coming, men sent to search for arms on the mainland; the wages of overseers of the works, on whom was laid the additional duty of exciting the workmen to faithful labour, and watching over the engines and springalds, barriers and brestages, as well as of inducing the inhabitants to take up arms, and the infantry to keep faithful watch,—wages paid to three horsemen and as many footmen for conducting to London a certain suspected party, a knight arrested in the island for having been known to hold intercourse with one Thomas de Frobeville, convicted of enmity to the king and his realm. The whole brings before us a scene of din, hurry, bustle, noise, and activity, bespeaking the apprehensions entertained by the king and his advisers of a hostile descent on the shores of the Island, and of the urgent need of placing it in a state of complete defence with as little delay as possible. The whole of this portion of the document will reward careful examination, as an interesting page of mediæval military history, rich in picturesque detail.