

A COMMISSION TO ARM AND ARRAY THE CLERGY IN 1400.

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THE document here given is taken from the Episcopal Register of Robert Rede, Bishop of Chichester, which is now being edited for the Sussex Record Society by Prebendary Deedes. As this particular document relates to a matter not strictly falling within episcopal jurisdiction, he kindly furnished me, at my request, with a transcript for publication in the *Collections* of our Archæological Society. We may begin by briefly describing its purport.

The Bishop addresses himself to Sir¹ William Whyte, Master of the College of Arundel, and Sir William Acton, Rector of the Church of Storrington, and tells them he has received a writ from the King (Henry IV.) to this effect: The King being informed of the malicious intentions of the French and others who were preparing to invade and destroy his kingdom and (as he tells the Bishop) subvert the Church of England, and being desirous to provide for the safety of his people and of holy church, has sent out commissions to summon all his faithful subjects to arm themselves and array themselves in the manner then in use for military service. The King then appeals to the known loyalty of the Bishop and other prelates and the clergy, and specially enjoins the Bishop to cause without delay all abbots, priors, religious and other ecclesiastical persons whatsoever in his diocese to arm and equip themselves according to their condition and means. And when armed they were to array themselves in thousands, hundreds and twenties, and to hold themselves ready to

¹ "Dominus" was the ordinary title of respect given to the higher clergy.

go at the Bishop's command wherever danger threatened within the kingdom.

After reciting this order from the King, the Bishop repeats it in his own authority to the two persons he has addressed as representing the deaneries of Storrington and Arundel. He repeats all the details of the King's requirements as to the array in regimental divisions, and finishes with requiring them not to omit to comply with the order as regards themselves and those subordinate to them.

No doubt similar orders were sent out throughout the diocese to representatives of the other deaneries.

The question presents itself, what was expected to follow from these orders? The order was one of special stringency and had already been issued to the civil officials. It referred to the national force usually known as the militia; yet it was not an ordinary commission to local knights to hold a view of arms. On such occasions the local militia was arrayed as here enjoined. The terms "thousands, hundreds, twenties," described a regiment as in the field. It was formed roughly of 1,000 men, who were divided into hundreds, each under an officer called "centenarius" (or captain), and the "centena" was sub-divided into five sections of 20 men each, under a "vintenarius" (or lieutenant). The "millena, centena, vintena" of our document may therefore be called a regiment containing 10 companies, each comprising five sections. A review of the militia of the city of Norwich (about 1355) arrayed in this fashion may be seen in *Norfolk Archaeology*, Vol. XIV., p. 263. But such a force was never in these days called into action. It was summoned for training and inspection. When the King wanted men for active service he demanded a certain specified number, 120, 80, 60 and so on according to the capacity of the town or county, and sent out Commissioners of Array to secure them. These small local quotas were drafted to some centre where the regimental array was formed. No mention of such array was made in the order to supply the small local contingents when they were wanted for foreign service.

The stringency of the order here issued to the clergy, as it had been to others, consists in the fact that they were (apparently) not only summoned to form themselves into a fully developed (? diocesan) regiment, but to remain in harness, ready to march at the Bishop's command to any place "within the kingdom" where they might be wanted. Moreover, as an evidence that some service was really expected of the clergy as distinct from the laity, and perhaps as evidence that it was not usually expected of them, we note the reference to the alleged peril impending on the Church of England which the French² are accused of desiring to subvert. Why they should want to do so is not evident. That Henry had not been acknowledged by the French as King of England is not an explanation, because the same thing had been alleged before in similar writs.

At least four more instances of these strange orders are recorded. The earliest which has come to light is of 44 Edward III. (1370).³ It is a writ to the Archbishop of Canterbury (as well as to other Bishops). It is nearly identical with our present document. A similar demand was made in 46 Edward III.⁴ Again in 47 E. the Bishop of Winchester is ordered to arm and array the clergy of his diocese and summon them when so arrayed to Southampton and the sea coasts in those parts, there to remain to watch over their safe custody as long as was necessary.⁵ A writ, corresponding exactly with that in Rede's Register, was also issued by Richard II. in his first year.⁶

It appears then indubitable that in the latter half of the fourteenth century there existed some sort of idea of occasionally calling out to personal military service in the militia all the clergy, high and low, secular and regular. Was it ever in any way carried out? However strange it may seem, we cannot but note that the

² The King does not speak of the "King of France," because he had already in the preamble assumed that title himself.

³ Given in Grose, *Military Antiquities*, Vol. I., p. 67.

⁴ Rymer, *Foedera*, Vol. VI., p. 726.

⁵ *Ibm.*, Vol. VII., p. 27.

⁶ *Ibm.*, Vol. VII., p. 162.

Bishop of Chichester (and presumably other Bishops were doing the same) makes no protest, but on the contrary adds his own authority to that of the King and commits to his deputies his own "power of canonical coercion." This action of the Bishop is, indeed, the most puzzling part of the whole thing. We could understand the civil power making an excessive demand on the clergy which they meant to use for pressure in other directions. But we cannot interpret the Bishop's action in such a way.

Yet it is fairly certain that no such personal service, at least on this organised scale, was ever rendered by the clergy. Grose, in his *Military Antiquities*,⁷ after referring to these "very extraordinary" orders (of one of which he gives a translation "as a matter of great curiosity"), remarks: "Notwithstanding these writs were at least three or four times issued, history does not inform us that these reverend battalions were ever actually called forth under arms." He discusses at considerable length the incongruity of such action, if it had ever been carried into effect.

Perhaps an explanation may best be found by noting a statement made in the writ of 44 Edward III., the earliest of the series, and not repeated in the later writs. The King there says to the Bishops that in the last Parliament, with their assent and that of the other prelates, nobles and commons of the realm, it was ordered that all the men of the said kingdom of England between 16 and 60, *as well clergy as laity* . . . should be armed and arrayed, &c. No such order appears in the Statutes passed by the Parliament of 1369. But in the Rolls of Parliament⁸ we find the following at the close of the record: "And besides, the King prayed and commanded (commanda em priant) all the Prelates there assembled that, in regard to the great perils and damages that might perchance happen to the kingdom and the Church of England by reason of the said war, if perchance his

Vol. I., p. 69.

⁸ Rot. Parl., Vol. III., p. 302.

adversary wished to enter the kingdom to destroy and subvert it, they would in defence of the kingdom give their aid and array their subordinates (subgitz), as well themselves as all [men] of religion, as Parsons, Vicars and other men (gentz) of Holy Church of every kind (qeconqes) to rebut the malice of his enemies, if perchance they wished to enter the kingdom. Which Prelates granted that they would do this in aid and defence of the kingdom and of Holy Church." This Parliament had just approved the King's renewal of the war with France.

I should gather from this statement that this was the first occasion when such action had been suggested. The King's "supplicatory" command implies that he was asking of the clergy in general something which they had not been in the habit of giving, that a call to arms addressed to the clergy as well as the laity was an unusual thing, only to be justified by stress of emergency. How far the clergy, as religious persons, were bound by the requirements of the Assize of Arms and the Statute of Winchester in the fourteenth century is not quite easy to determine. The Assize of Arms speaks of "*quicumque liber laicus*," every lay freeman. It must be remembered that most of the higher clergy, as Bishops, Abbots, Priors, and many of the lower clergy, held estates not attached to their benefices, and described in the language of the time as held "*per baroniam seu laicum feodum*." In respect of these they were liable to the same obligations as a lay holder, as, for instance, paying their portion of a lay subsidy.⁹ For these they would be called upon either to serve in arms themselves or find a substitute. But if such an obligation lay upon every clergyman, as an able-bodied man of free condition, one does not see why in an emergency the King need have specially appealed to the Bishops to urge the clergy to fulfil their accustomed duty.

Moreover, the King's writ, issued in pursuance of the assent of the Prelates and forwarded with added sanction by the Bishops to their Rural Deans, certainly seems to

⁹ Rot. Parl., Vol. I., pp. 239, 270, 443.

contemplate (at least for the special occasion) the formation of what Grose calls "reverend battalions," separate bodies of the religious persons called to array as well as arm themselves. If it were merely intended that the clergy and other religious persons should undertake this new obligation by proxy, finding a man to fill their place, nothing could be more inconvenient than to organise such a body of men by themselves. The substitutes would surely have been told to join the "hundreds" and "twenties" in their own civil divisions, in Sussex their rapes. Yet the Bishop tells the Rural Deans to have the local force, when arrayed, mustered before them, at a place and on a day named by them, of which they are to give previous notice to the Bishop. This cannot mean the absorption of the units of the clerical contingent into the county array.

For the present, therefore, the difficulty of explaining these royal demands on the clergy must remain unsolved. On the one hand we have a Bishop, in obedience to the King's demand, calling upon all spiritual and ecclesiastical persons of his diocese, under penalty of canonical coercion, to form themselves into an armed body of militia. On the other hand we not only have no historical evidence of such an order ever having been carried out, but we fail to see the possibility of its execution. A fighting Bishop or Abbot here and there might not shock the spirit of the age, but for monks in a wholesale fashion to leave their monasteries or the canons their colleges, or, still more, for the parochial clergy and chaplains in a body to leave their parishes deprived of divine offices, even to defend the Church against the malicious designs of the French, would have been as abhorrent to the feelings of the fourteenth century as to those of our one.

We can only conclude that, while there was evidently an intention to carry out these orders at the various times when they were issued, it was always contingent on an emergency which never actually arrived. The apprehended danger did not come, and the Bishop and his deans were not called upon to lead their forces into the field.

EXTRACT FROM THE REGISTER OF ROBERT REDE BISHOP OF
CHICHESTER, fol. vi., verso and fo. vii.

Commissio ad videndum Clerum armari et arraiari.

Robertus permissione divina Cicestrensis Episcopus dilectis filiis dño Willelmo Whyte magistro Collegii Arundell et dño Willelmo Acton Rectori Ecclesie de Storghton nostre Cicestrensis diocesis salutem graciam et benedictionem. Breve Regium recepimus in hec verba Henricus¹⁰ Dei gracia Rex Anglie et Francie et dominus Hibernie venerabili in Christo patri R. eadem gracia Episcopo Cicestrensi salutem. Satis informati estis qualiter inimici nostri Francie et alii sibi adherentes facinora sua erga nos et ligeos nostros licet indirecte de die in diem circumquaque ostendentes cum magna classe navium cum maxima multitudine armatorum et bellatorum super mare congregati diversas villas super costeris regni nostri Anglie invadere ac nos et regnum nostrum predictum necnon populum nostrum per terram et mare destruere et ecclesiam Anglicanam subvertere omnibus viribus intendunt et proponunt, per quod volentes salvacioni dicti regni et populorum nostrorum ac ecclesie sancte contra maliciam ipsorum inimicorum operante altissimo providere per diversas commissiones assignavimus certos fideles nostros in singulis Comitatibus regni nostri predicti ad arraiandum et arraiari et armari faciendum omnes homines defensibiles videlicet quemlibet eorum juxta statum et facultates suas et eos arraiatos armatos et munitos in arraiacione

Commission to see the Clergy armed and arrayed.

Robert by Divine permission Bishop of Chichester to his beloved sons, Sir William Whyte, master of the Colledge of Arundel, and Sir William Acton, Rector of the Church of Storrington, of our diocese of Chichester greeting, grace and benediction. We have received a royal Writ in these words: Henry, by the grace of God King of England and France and Lord of Ireland, to the venerable father in Christ R. by the same grace Bishop of Chichester greeting: You are sufficiently informed how our enemies of France and others adhering to them, showing in all directions day by day (albeit indirectly) their malice towards us and our lieges, assembling over the sea with a great fleet of ships [and] a very great multitude of armed men and warriors, are designing and proposing with all their force to invade divers towns upon the coasts of our kingdom of England and to destroy us and our said kingdom, and also our people by land and sea, and to subvert the Church of England. Wherefore we, wishing with the help of the most Highest, to provide for the safety of our said kingdom and people and of holy Church against the malice of our said enemies, have by divers commissions assigned certain of our faithful [subjects] in all the counties of our said kingdom to array, and to cause to be arrayed and armed, all men capable of making defence, to wit, every one of them according to his condition and means, and when arrayed,

¹⁰ The corresponding writ to the Archbishop of Canterbury is given in Rymer's *Foedera*, Vol. VIII., p. 123.

hujusmodi teneri faciendum sic quod semper prompti sint et parati ad proficiscendum in defensionem regni nostri predicti ubi ac quociens et quando ex hostium incurribus periculum immineat aut necesse fuerit aliquale. Advertentes vero quod vos et ceteri prelati ac totus clerus dicti Regni una cum aliis fidelibus nostris ad resistendum dictis inimicis pro salvatione dicte [sic]¹¹ Ecclesie et ejusdem regni manus tenemini apponere adjutrices Vobis in fide et dilectione quibus nobis tenemini firmiter injungimus et mandamus quatenus consideratis gravibus dampnis et periculis imminentibus per aggressus inimicorum nostrorum predictorum omnes Abbates, Priores, religiosos et alias personas ecclesiasticas quascunque vestre diocesis quacunque dilatione postposita armari et arraiari et armis competentibus videlicet quemlibet eorum juxta statum possessiones et facultates suas muniri et eos in millenis centenis et vintenens poni faciatis Ita quod prompti sint et parati ad proficiscendum ad mandatum vestrum una cum aliis fidelibus nostris contra inimicos nostros infra dictum regnum nostrum ad ipsos cum Dei adjutorio debellandum expugnandum et destruendum et ad eorum maliciam et proterviam propulsandum et conterendum et [hoc]¹² sicut nos et honorem nostrum ac vestrum et salvationem dicte ecclesie et regni nostri diligitis nullatenus omitatis. Teste me ipso apud Westmon' xxvij die Januarii Anno regni nostri primo.¹³ Vobis igitur conjunctim auctoritate hujus brevis committimus et firmiter

armed and equipped to cause them to be kept in such array, so that they should be always ready and prepared to go forth in defence of our aforesaid kingdom where and as often as, and when, by the incursions of our enemies, peril may threaten or any necessity should arise, considering also that you and other prelates and the whole Clergy of the said kingdom, together with our other faithful [lieges] are bound to lend helping hands to resist our said enemies for the salvation of the said Church and Kingdom, by the faith and love whereby you are bound to us we firmly enjoin and command you that, considering the grievous damages and perils threatening by the aggressions of our aforesaid enemies, you cause all Abbots, Priors, religious and other ecclesiastical persons whatsoever of your diocese, setting aside all delay, to be armed and arrayed and equipped with sufficient arms, to wit, each of them according to his condition, possessions and means, and to be placed in thousands, hundreds and twenties, so that they be ready and prepared to go forth at your command, together with our other faithful [lieges] against our enemies within our said kingdom with the help of God to defeat, conquer and destroy them, and to beat down and crush their malice and insolence, and this as you love us and our honour and your own, and the salvation of the said Church and our kingdom by no means neglect. Witness myself at Westminster the 27th day of January, in the first year of our reign. We therefore, by authority of this writ, Commission and by firm injunction command

¹¹ Sancte in other copies.

¹² This is inserted in the other writs.

¹³ 27 January, 1383.

injungendo mandamus quatinus omnes Abbates Priores religiosos et alias personas ecclesiasticas quascunque infra ambitus decanatum de Stoughton et Arundell dicte nostre Cicestrensis diocesis constitutos cum omni qua potestis celeritate armari et arraiari et armis competentibus videlicet quemlibet eorum juxta statum possessiones et facultates suas muniri et eos arraiatos armatos et munitos in arraiacione hujusmodi teneri faciatis neenon in ipsa arraiacione ipsos coram vobis ad certos diem et locum eis per vos limitandos de quibus die et loco per aliquem certum nuncium vestrum volumus et mandamus nos ante diem hujusmodi cum omni celeritate certiorari monstrare faciatis proponentes eos prout convenit in millenis centenis et vintenis juxta vim formam et effectum brevis antedicti sic quod prompti sint semper et parati ad proficiscendum ad mandatum nostrum una cum aliis fidelibus dicti domini Regis contra dictos inimicos infra regnum Anglie pro defensione ejusdem ac debellacione et expugnacione dictorum inimicorum juxta quod breve predictum exigit et requirit. Ad que omnia et singula facienda vobis de quorum fidelitate et industria plene confidimus vices nostras una cum regia [auctoritate] nobis in hac parte data et cohercionis canonicè potestate plenarie committimus per presentes et ea firmiter vobis injungimus adimplenda, sicut indignacionem domini nostri regis consideratis periculis premissis vitare velitis Et quid in premissis feceritis et faciendum duxeritis et qualiter unusquisque de personis supradictis arraiatus fuerit et armatus nos celerius quo poteritis certificetis literis vestris patentibus habentibus hunc tenorem sigillo autentico consignatis, nomina singulorum

you conjointly that with all the speed you can you cause all Abbots, Priors, Religious and other Ecclesiastical persons whatever appointed within the circuits of the deaneries of Storrington and Arundel of our said diocese of Chichester to be armed and arrayed and equipped with competent arms, to wit, each of them according to his condition, possessions and means, and when arrayed, armed and equipped to be held in such array, and moreover that you cause them to be mustered before you at a certain day and place to be defined to them by you, of which day and place we will that with all speed before such day we be informed by your sure messenger, arranging them as is suitable in thousands, hundreds and twenties, according to the force, form and effect of the aforesaid writ, so that they be always ready and prepared to go forth at our command, together with the other faithful lieges of the said Lord King against his said enemies within the kingdom of England for the defence of the same, and the defeat and expulsion of the said enemies according to what the aforesaid writ demands and requires. To doing all and every of which things we by these presents fully commit our office, together with the royal [authority] given to us in this behalf and the power of canonical coercion, to you in whose fidelity and industry we fully confide, and we firmly enjoin you to fulfil them, as you wish to avoid the anger of our Lord the King considering the aforementioned perils. And what you do and think proper to be done in the above matters and how each of the aforesaid persons is to be arrayed and armed, certify us as quickly as possible

armatorum et arraiatorum hujusmodi et modum arraiacionis et armacionis sue in quadam cedula literis vestris annectenda plenius continentibus Vosque quatinus ad vos et vestros attinet juxta exigentiam status possessionum et facultatum vestrorum armare arraiare et armis competentibus ad effectum supradictum consimiliter munire curetis. Dat' in manerio nostro de Amberle x^{mo} die mensis Februarii Anno dñi millesimo ccc^{mo} nonagesimo nono¹⁴ et nostre translacionis Anno tercio.

by your letters patent having this tenor sealed with an authentic seal, containing more fully the names of all such persons armed and arrayed and the manner of their array and arming in a certain schedule attached to your letters. And take heed that so far as pertains to you and yours according to the requirement of your condition, possessions and means you likewise be armed, arrayed and be equipped with competent arms to the aforesaid effect. Given in our Manor of Amberley on the 10th day of the month of February in the year of the Lord 1399, and the third year of our translation.

¹⁴ 10 Feb., 1399, O.S., 1400, N.S.
