

REVIEW.

Thomas Langley and the Bishopric of Durham 1406-1437, by R. L. Storey. Published for the Church Historical Society by the S.P.C.K., London, 1961. pp. 280. 50s.

Thomas Langley is by tradition one of the great bishops of Durham during the Middle Ages. His episcopate lasting 31 years was exceeded in length only by Bishop Puiset (1153-1195) and Bishop Hatfield (1345-1381), and like both of these he is remembered by a survey of his lands in County Durham. His tenure of the see of Durham was marked by a great constitutional struggle in the course of which Langley was able to vindicate the regalian privileges of his palatinate against such of his Durham subjects as wished to keep the burden of royal bureaucracy at arm's length, like their neighbours of Northumberland: a struggle which bears a cursory resemblance to the earlier conflict between Bishop Bek, another great predecessor, and his rebellious tenants. The parallels in the careers of Langley and Bek are indeed remarkable, although with significant divergences which emphasize the century and a quarter which separates them as bishops. Neither were University graduates, although both are reputed to have attended college at Oxford and Cambridge respectively. Both entered the Church rather as a means of attaining administrative authority than as a spiritual vocation, although neither was oblivious of his religious responsibilities. Both left ordinances for the reform of the parochial administration of the great episcopal manors of St. Andrew Auckland, Chester-le-Street and Lanchester. From his early days Langley had attached himself to the service of John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, and rose to national stature with the seizure of power by Henry Boling-

broke, Gaunt's heir. Such a background befits a prelate in the age of livery and maintenance. Bek had attached himself to the Lord Edward before his accession to the throne. Whereas, however, under Edward I personal influences in the King's Council were blanketed in anonymity save for the two ministers Robert Burnell, chancellor from 1274 to his death in 1292, and Walter Langton, treasurer from 1295 until the king's death in 1307, by the reign of the Lancastrian Henries power at court was more neatly finger-posted. The King's Secretary, the Keeper of the Privy Seal, the Keeper of the great Seal or Chancellor, were all officers of graded status and known sphere of influence, and through these offices Thomas Langley duly passed to emerge triumphant as royal nominee for Durham in May 1406, having failed to secure London or York previously. Proved fidelity to royal interests and also administrative experience were the recognized prerequisites for election to Durham. Antony Bek was a King's Councillor of diplomatic and financial experience but his only royal office of duration was Constable of the Tower of London in a less departmentalized age.

The formal documentation of the life of Thomas Langley is infinitely fuller than for the life of Antony Bek, thanks to the survival of Langley's episcopal register and many of his palatine archives and to his tenure of the Chancellorship of England: yet evidence of their personal relationships comes very largely from the names of those friends who named them executors of their wills. The only personal detail recorded of Langley is that he was bearded. Bek in his forties was known by the nickname of "little Antony" (*Antoninus*). Yet the anecdotes related by the Durham chronicler Robert Graystones to illustrate Bek's "magnanimity" do something to create a living likeness of the thirteenth-century statesman prelate awing the crowds to silence with his state: as emphatically does not the list of good works ascribed to Langley by Graystones's continuator. In the first full-scale biography of Langley to be written Dr. R. L. Storey has distilled from the mass of formal records emanating under

Langley's authority, either as Chancellor or as Bishop of Durham in his dual capacity of diocesan and palatinate holder, the essence of a high-ranking Civil Servant of the fifteenth century. "Langley owed his success to his outstanding administrative ability. He had the faculty of being able to attend to a great variety of subjects simultaneously, and to give to each a degree of care that extended to its smallest detail. . . . He had the imagination to see that it was necessary to improve the secretarial methods of his palatine chancery and to remodel his financial organization, and his knowledge of the governments of England and the Duchy [of Lancaster] suggested to him practices that might be adopted. The same practical sense can be observed in his work as diocesan" (p. 221).

Dr. Storey's scholarly study ranges over all Langley's national and local activities but is most illuminating in the chapters on the County Palatine and Diocese of Durham. His ability to recreate "atmosphere" from the dry items of receivers' accounts makes his handling of the Durham archives and Langley's register a delight to read. "Purchases by the receiver permit a glimpse of the auditors at work, comfortably seated on cushions behind their table covered with green cloth, with an *abacus* to assist their calculations, and their books that were to be kept in a leather bag. The exchequer chamber must have been a gloomy room, or the auditors had to work late, for once fifteen pounds of candles were required for their better illumination" (p. 83). The book concludes with a detailed itinerary of the bishop between 1406 and 1436, demonstrating the way in which a medieval statesman bishop was required to range England and even Western Europe in the course of duty, and a critical edition of the Hartlepool proceedings which once threatened to undermine the legal foundations of Langley's temporal authority in Durham.

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