

MISSENDEN ABBEY.

By JOHN PARKER, F.S.A.

BEFORE going into the history of an abbey which was founded in one of the secluded valleys of the Chilterns—one of the valleys so well known to those acquainted with the district, where, within narrow bounds, the luxury of green meadows is only equalled by the beauty of the streams intersecting them, and where, on the hills above, the beech woods are ever the perfect ideal in each season, as it comes round, of forest scenery—it would be probably of interest to take a very short review of the aspect of the monasteries in this country at the time of their dissolution, more especially as the subject is one that is engaging, certainly more calmly and impartially than at any period since their suppression, the attention of many students of history.

We know more now of the position of the monasteries on the eve of their dissolution, of the cause and effect of their suppression. We can judge better than our fathers could, and with far greater impartiality, of the condition of the religious houses, as the Commission of Enquiry proceeded, since we are reaping the advantage of the laborious investigations of such men as the late Mr. Brewer and of Mr. Gairdner amongst the state papers at the Record Office; and, by the way, no despatches or letter-writings, perhaps, have yielded so much information, so clear an insight into the passing events of a bygone age as they actually occurred, as those of the Ambassador Chapuys to his imperial master.

There is no doubt that the scandal of pluralities had much to say to the disesteem to which ecclesiastics were subjected in the time of Henry VIII. Father Gasquet, in his able work on "Henry VIII. and the English Monasteries," has, with singular impartiality, making all allowance for his position as himself belonging to the



Seal of the Abbey of
Missenden.

Order of St. Benedict, traced the primary causes which led to the difficulties of monastic institutions in this country. One of these causes, after pointing out the injury to the Church arising from the practice of rewarding foreigners by nominating them to vacant sees, he thus describes: "No less detrimental to the well-being of the Church in England at this time was the crying abuse and scandal of pluralities. The holding of many livings by one man was no new grievance. At the end of the thirteenth century, according to Archbishop Winchelsea's register, there were some who had fifteen, others thirteen, while one held no fewer than twenty-three benefices. The twenty-three clergymen given in the list held an average of eight livings each. In the sixteenth century there was still grave cause of complaint, some priests having as many as ten or twelve benefices, and, very possibly, resident in none, while there were 'plenty of learned men in the Universities' for whom no preferment could be found. Cardinal Wolsey himself set the example. He held not only a plurality of livings, but was Bishop of more than one See, whilst he farmed others. He also obtained the Abbey of St. Albans *in Commendam*."*

There has been a tendency in the present day to depreciate the Church in this country in the eighteenth and the early part of the nineteenth centuries on account of the number of pluralists, and the nepotism that prevailed among the clergy, which only the Church Discipline Act could cure; but when we realize the position of the Church thus given in our earlier history, we are bound to think more charitably of the ecclesiastic of the last generation.

Father Gasquet quotes from a remarkable sermon of Dean Colet, in which that outspoken divine says: "Let the laws be rehearsed that command the personal residence of curates (rectors) in their churches. For of this many evils grow, because all things nowadays are done by vicars and parish priests, yea, and those foolish also, and unmeet, and oftentimes wicked, that seek none

* "Henry VIII. and the English Monasteries," Vol. I., pp. 21, 22, quoting Bishop Gibson's "Codex," p. 946; "Complaints against Clergy in Parl., 1523," No. 6.

other thing in the people than foul lucre, whereof cometh occasion of evil heresies and ill Christianity in the people."

Episcopal and clerical neglect had, no doubt, much to do with the decline of religious houses in the estimation of the people, and with the lowering of their own internal discipline. Evidence is abundant that at the time of the dissolution the estates were often mismanaged and the monastic buildings in a sad state of repair. Such was the case with the Abbey of Missenden. At the same time, great demands were being made by king and noble on the resources of monasteries, which, whilst proving that their moral influence was waning, also accounted for the increased difficulties of keeping up their establishments efficiently.

The suppressions originated with Wolsey, to enable him to found his college at Christ Church and a college at Ipswich, his native town, and the main reason assigned for dissolving the monasteries, the condition of which was afterwards examined into by the Visitors, was the moral delinquencies of the religious. There is much to be said about the characters of the Visitors themselves and the manner in which they performed their task of investigation, which I propose presently to touch upon; but perhaps a summary of the result of the inquiry cannot be more accurately given than in the words of Dr. Lingard, who says, "That from their (the Visitors) reports a statement was compiled and laid before Parliament, which, while it allotted the praise of regularity to the greater monasteries, described the less opulent as abandoned to sloth and immorality."*

The reports themselves have, without doubt, to be carefully scrutinized, considering the times, and the master under whom the Commissioners served. The more light is thrown on Henry's character from the revelations made to us by Mr. Gairdner, the more we see, as his reign lengthens on, the tyranny and despotic spirit of the king. The risings, first in Lincolnshire, and then the Northern rising, known as "The Pilgrimage of Grace," occasioned by the apprehension of the people that not only the religious houses would be de-

* "History," Vol. VI. (Third Ed.), p. 298.

spoiled but that their parish churches would be desecrated, were suppressed with a vengeance which knew but little pity. Such words as these in the instructions the king gives to the Duke of Norfolk convincingly show the character of the martial law then enforced: "Our pleasure is that before you shall close up our said banner again, you shall, in anywise, cause such dreadful execution to be done upon a good number of the inhabitants of every town, village, and hamlet that have offended in this rebellion, as well by the hanging them up in trees, as by quartering of them and the setting of their heads and quarters in every town, great and small, and in all such other places, as they may be a fearful spectacle to all other hereafter that would practise any like matter; which we require you to do without pity or respect, according to our former letters, remembering that it shall be much better that these traitors should perish in their wilful unkind and traitorous follies than that so slender punishment should be done upon them as the dread thereof should not be a warning to others." These sanguinary instructions were carried out, and the terror and "dread," as Gasquet says, "each one had of being involved in the same fate, resistance was at an end."*

Of course, it must be borne in mind that these risings were of a partial character, and that Parliament had, before the first steps were taken for the dissolution of the monasteries, assented to the suppression of those monasteries whose income did not exceed £200 a year. To this it may be answered that the Parliament then constituted was a body wholly subservient to the king, bending, as Hallam says, to "every breath of his capricious humour."† Yet, granting the arbitrary power which the king exercised, and his control over both Lords and Commons, there was in the nation a tendency, which had been gathering in strength from the days of Wycliffe, to lead to enquiry, the effect of which was undoubtedly the neglect of the shrines, once the object of such unbounded reverence—as education, too, and

* "Henry VIII. and English Monasteries," Vol. II. (Second Ed.), p. 165.

† "Constitn. Hist. of Eng.," Vol. I., p. 51.

the habits which make for peace were spreading among the people, the needs-be for the protection the monastery afforded against general lawlessness was no longer so apparent.

The tendency before alluded to, rightly or wrongly, had made the age of the Tudors by no means an age of reverence for the past; there was a spirit abroad, not only in England but among the other Teutonic races, which gave rise to what we understand as the Reformation, the result of which, as we well know, was to uproot much that had been held sacred in the Middle Ages, and the sympathy with this spirit is seen in a different form among the Latin as well as the Teutonic races in the age which we term the Renaissance. Such "fair churches" as those of Rievaulx, of Jervaulx, and of Furness, could scarcely have been desecrated for the advantage of selling the bells and the lead that covered the roofs, had there not been something beyond even the arbitrary will of Henry to account for the spoliation. There were among the monks themselves those who were known as the "New World Men," and their influence tended to weaken the institutions which had held such a powerful sway over the consciences of men for so lengthened a time. We cannot, however, with all these causes which then weighed with the nation, understand how vast and magnificent churches, such as the great monasteries possessed, could have been wantonly desecrated and forsaken.

The characters of those who were the chief of the king's agents in carrying through the work of the destruction of the monasteries have of late received a careful and thorough scrutiny. Wolsey gave the first impetus, but it was Cromwell, the man trained under him, who, with untiring energy and with a head that never wearied of the minutest details, was able to do for the king the work of the suppression of the religious houses in all parts of the kingdom; and in accomplishing his task he was not unmindful of his own interests—it cannot be doubted that from the commencement of his public career Cromwell was open to bribes, and presents, and exactions from the weak and dependent.

The Visitation of the Monasteries between 1535 and 1536 gives a less disagreeable side to Cromwell's

character, in the destructive work in which he was engaged, in an incident recorded, which will be of interest from its connection with Buckinghamshire.

In the words of Father Gasquet—"Poor Margaret Vernon, prioress of Little Marlow, had her house almost emptied. 'Your Visitors,' she writes to Cromwell, 'have been here of late, who hath discharged three of my sisters. The one is Dame Catherine, the other two are the young women that were last professed, which is not a little to my discomfort. I most humbly beseech you to be so special, good master, unto me, your poor bedewoman, as to give me your best advertisement and counsel, what shall be best for me to take, seeing there shall be none left here but myself and this poor maiden.' Cromwell's advice appears to have been what might be expected from him. At any rate, she soon gave up her house. She is next found in London, trying to get an interview with Cromwell at the Rolls, in order to make him keep his promise to provide for her. His servants will not allow her to see their master, and the multitude of suitors is so great that she cannot get a hearing. The king, she complains, has granted away the lease of her farm at Marlow, and she is in great 'trouble and unquietness.' Cromwell generously offers to lend her £40 to defray her expenses at Stepney, provided she gives him *good security*. In the end she becomes governess to his son Gregory, of whom she writes, 'Your son is in good health, and is a very good scholar, and can construe his *Pater-noster, Ave and Credo.*'"*

If Cromwell's proceedings have been clearly brought to light by recent research, so have the characters of the Visitors appointed by him to investigate the condition of the religious houses, been the subject of searching investigation. The four most prominent of the Visitors were Dr. Richard Layton, Thomas Legh, Dr. John London, and John Ap Rice. The mildest accusation which can be brought against them would be that they went about their work with prejudiced minds. Mr. Froude says, "Their servants with the hot Puritan blood already in their veins . . . scorning and hating the whole

* See Gasquet's "Henry VIII. and The English Monasteries," Vol. I., pp. 275 and 276.

monastic race, had paraded their contempt before the world; they had ridden along the highways decked in the spoils of the desecrated chapels, with copes for doublets, tunics for saddle-cloths, and silver relic cases hammered into sheaths for their daggers.*

Dr. Layton was the holder of several preferments, amongst them the Archdeaconry of Buckingham. His correspondence with Cromwell shows his subserviency to his master, his anxiety to please him, to send his reports couched in terms to fall in with Cromwell's and the king's predetermined purpose with regard to the religious houses, and to gratify Cromwell's cupidity and accessibility to the reception of bribes from those, whether abbot, prior, or monk, whose only hope of retaining hold of their monasteries was left to the decision of Henry's powerful minister.

Thomas Legh is represented to us through the reports of another commissioner, Ap Rice, to Cromwell, the king's Vicar-General, as "a young man of intolerable elation," "who," in the words of Father Gasquet, "went about with a retinue of twelve servants in livery."† He seems to have behaved with intolerance, not to say insolence, towards the inmates of the monasteries. Ap Rice himself appears to have been a man whose character was not an unblemished one; there is, however, no evidence of his obtaining ecclesiastical promotion for his services. An effort was made by Cromwell to appoint him to some office in the Cathedral Church of Salisbury. "Against this the Dean and Chapter protested in several vigorous letters, and the appointment was not made."‡

Dr. London, the last of the four principal Visitors I have named, was a man who held important preferments in the Church; it will be interesting to record that he was Dean of the collegiate church of Wallingford, and from 1526 to 1542, warden of New College, Oxford. On the authority of Father Gasquet, "his letters do not reveal any particular animosity against the monks. His zeal in Cromwell's service was principally displayed in

* "Froude's His.," Vol. III., p. 97.

† "Henry VIII. and the English Monasteries," Vol. I., p. 445.

‡ *Ib.*, Vol. I., p. 457, quoting from R. O. Crom. Corr. xxxvii.

collecting for him the plate and jewels of the monastic churches, and in defacing those sacred buildings.”*

Farther on, Father Gasquet says of London: “In the work of devastation, London was certainly the most terrible of all the monastic spoilers. He writes, for instance, that he has pulled down the silver image of our Lady of Caversham and will send it by the next barge from Reading. He has defaced the chapel, and thinks the lead had better be pulled off the roof. The lodgings of the priest from Notley Abbey, who served this place of pilgrimage, ‘with its large garden and orchard,’ he has kept, because, as he tells Cromwell, ‘it will do well for any friend of yours.’”†

Other instances are given of Dr. London’s spoliations, but a reference to his doings in Berkshire, and incidentally to Notley Abbey, in Buckinghamshire, appeared to be appropriate in investigating the history of an abbey in the latter county.

Everything that is brought to light at the present time tends to show that the investigations made by the king’s Visitors were conducted with a rapidity and an unfavourable bias, which, with the suspicion attaching to the characters of the Visitors themselves, weaken the reports they forwarded to Cromwell, who had sent them on their errand with an undoubtedly predetermined purpose as regards the fate of the religious houses. On the other hand, it is also clear that for the most part the Bishop’s visitations of the monasteries were searching, and often brought to light, among the smaller communities, great scandals, as they unfortunately did with reference to the Abbey of Missenden.

An examination into the condition of things was, in the first instance made, as far as we can judge, thoroughly and minutely, all complaints of the religious were put down in detail under what were known as *comperta*. Upon the evidence thus afforded the judgment of the Bishop or his commissioners was founded in what are termed *injunctions*. These injunctions are of the utmost value, and coming from the Bishops before the friction took place with Rome, on the question of the king’s divorce,

* “Henry VIII. and the English Monasteries,” Vol. I. p. 458.

† *Ib.*, p. 461, and quoting from Wright, p. 222.

they certainly disclosed the views of those who could have no predetermined ill-will to the religious houses. The lesser monasteries were often mismanaged, the buildings out of repair, and the community in debt. Such was the position of the Friars in these troublous times that the maintenance of their houses was next to an impossibility. The Friars Minor of Aylesbury were in this plight. "Dr. London thought their ornaments 'very coarse,' and sold them all 'with the glass windows and their utensils.'"*

The grave charges against the king in the suppressions of the religious houses are not confined to the mode in which these were carried out; but, as one of the consequences, we reflect with feelings akin to indignation at the desecration of the tombs of some of the noblest of the land, who had, as was so frequently the case, sought in lifetime to secure a resting-place for their bones in the quiet seclusion of a monastic church. Missenden Abbey, as we shall see, was thus selected by its founder, and by others of gentle birth.

Then we suffer at the present day for the loss of the great tithes which should have been restored, wholly or partially, to the parish from which they issued, to be applied for objects devoted to the best interests of its inhabitants. The poor, too, were the losers when the estates of the abbey passed to a royal favourite; there was some stipulation that a portion of monastic incomes should be devoted to charitable purposes and hospitality, but the obligation seems to have been soon forgotten, and must have been as a vague promise to reconcile the people to the spoliation. The pensions granted to abbots and favoured monks, it is due to say, seem to have been paid, as a general rule, with regularity. Whilst referring to pensions, however, we should bear in mind that those monks who had been unfavourably reported upon by the Visitors, but who, in spite of the report, received pensions, may be acquitted of serious accusations, as we have abundant evidence that the royal favour was not bestowed with a too bountiful hand, or with a spirit that overlooked the misconduct of the doomed commu-

* Gasquet's "Henry VIII., and the English Monasteries," Vol. II., p. 256, quoting R.O. Crom. Corr. xxiii. 81.

nities. We must do justice to the last members of the religious house of Missenden in the light of the foregoing remarks, as besides the pensions given to Otewell, the last of the abbots, Thomas Barnard obtained the vicarage of the abbey, and John Slythurst became curate of Lee, with a pension of £8, both of whom were monks of the abbey.

Buckinghamshire was not rich in monastic foundations. Wherever, therefore, these ecclesiastical establishments are to be found in the county, the local Archæological Society should take especial pains to search out the origin of the foundations and their subsequent history. It should be always borne in mind that the cultivation, learning, and mental progress of a community in the Middle Ages chiefly depended on the monastery, that as education then was confined almost entirely to the clerical order, so was it that letters only flourished within its walls. There was the library; there lived the chronicler, the poet, the divine, and the transcriber and illuminator of the precious manuscripts handed down to us.

Conflicting accounts are given of the origin of Missenden Abbey, so that it may be said its actual foundation is still left in obscurity. I will refer to three documents, each of which speaks of its foundation. The first is a foundation charter, to which I shall again call attention, dated in 1133, being a grant of lands by the founder, William of Missenden, to Daniel, the abbot, and his successors, and the fraternity.

An inquisition taken before John Parker of Elneggs, in the 51st Edward III. (1331), on the oath of John at Broke, William Broghton, Johan Ramkyn, William Caldicote, Robert Moreton, John Bere, William Wydmore, William Allnashe, and John Selby, some of them familiar names at this day, declared that the abbey was not a royal foundation, but was of the foundation of William of Missenden, formerly Lord of Missenden, that he held the Manor of Missenden from the Earl of Gloucester by military service, and which abbey was founded by the aforesaid William in the year of our Lord's incarnation, 1293, "in complete and perpetual charity."

Another inquisition "concerning the founder and

certain of those succeeding patrons of the place" states that it is found in the book of John Toftez, Prior of the Monastery of the Blessed Virgin of Missenden in the county of Buckingham, that William Missenden, knight, was first founder of the said abbey, and founded it in the year of our Lord, 1336.* The document goes on to say that "he lies in the chapter-house of the same abbey under a marble slab with three crosses engraved above."

On the authority of Lysons, an ancient court book of the manor states that the abbey was founded by the D'Oyleys, and augmented by the Missendens, pursuant to a vow made on escaping from shipwreck.† Lysons says, "It is probable, therefore, that the benefactions of Sir William de Missenden in 1293 were of such importance, and the former income of the convent so small, that it was looked upon as a second foundation, and that he was, even in his own time, called and deemed the founder."‡ The patronage was afterwards in the Brudenells.

We are told that, at the first, this was an abbey of Black Canons, dedicated to the blessed Virgin, and built within the Manor of Missenden on part of the possessions of the Earls of Gloucester.§

Many of the family of the Missendens, the great benefactors of this house, were buried in the chancel and chapter-house of this abbey.

The last inquisition from which I have quoted was extracted from an ancient membrane M.S. once in the possession of Francis Missenden de Heyling, in the county of Leicester, Esquire (1610). In it there are references to the burial of the founder's family in the form of memoranda. The following are extracts from these records, translated from the Latin:—

"Memorandum.—That the Lady Isabella Gulafre, heiress and kinswoman of the said William, knight and founder, lies before the altar of the Blessed Mary in the Chapel of the Virgin, on the side near the wall, with the epitaph sculptured above,

* The date incorrect.

† See "Mag. Brit., Buckinghamshire," Vol. I., p. 606.

‡ Lyson's "Topographical and Historical Account of Buckinghamshire," pp. 606, 607.

§ See Lipscomb's "History and Antiquities of the County of Buckingham," Vol. II., p. 366.

which said Isabella was the wife of Thomas of Missenden, knight ; and he lies in the same chapel on the southern side of the said Isabella, near her, under a marble slab, and an epitaph sculptured with these words in Norman-French :

‘Of the earth I was made and formed,
And to the earth I return,
Thomas Missenden heretofore named.
Jesu, on my soul have pity.’

He died in the year of our Lord 1369, in the month of October.”

“Before the high altar of Missenden is placed a certain marble slab engraved above : John Iwordby, esquire, and Katherine his wife, daughter and heiress of Barnard Missenden, the patron of this abbey ; which Katherine died on the tenth day of July, 1336, and the said John died in the year of our Lord 1400, of whose souls God have mercy. Amen. But the said John Iwordby does not lie under the slab, as before-mentioned, but another place, and the said John Iwordby and the said Katherine had between them a son and heir, Nicholas, which same Nicholas took a wife Hamden, and died in the Plect, which same Nicholas had a surviving son, named John, who had died. Also, it is said that Barnard Missenden was the son of the said Edward, the son of the said Thomas, knight, which said Barnard and Isabella had one daughter and co-heiress, the wife of John Fromo of Buckingham, and had a portion of the estate of the said Isabella. Which same Barnard died and lies in the Church of Buckingham near the wall in the aisle.”

“Memorandum.—That the said Isabella, after the decease of the said Barnard, married Mortimer, and after his death married Lord John Cheney.”^o

“Memorandum.—That it is said in the book of the Abbey of Missenden that Thomas of Missenden, who took to wife Isabella Cullofre aforesaid, was son of the same Mareschal of Missenden, called John Marshall, to whose prudence, humanity, and military fortune in the days of Edward the Third, King of England, who loved him, and made him knight, and chose him in marriage for said Isabella Cullofre, kinswoman and heir of the said Lord William, the first founder of the said Abbey of Missenden, and said Thomas had one brother, who was called Antonius Marshall, who was Abbot of Missenden, and died at London, September, 1374.”

The MS. comprising the Chartulary of Missenden Abbey is Harleian M.S., 3688, in the M.S. Department of the British Museum, and contains 80 documents entitled, “Liber Cartarum Monasterii Beatæ Mariæ de Missenden Compilatus et Completus Communitati Convent. de Missenden per fratrem Robertum de Welves Decimo κ κ Martii, Anno Domini, Millo—ccc—Tricessimo” [A.D. 1330].

^o Chenies.

The first Charter is that of William de Missenden, dated in "the year of our Lord's incarnation" 1133, and the last of Agnes Huse widow, formerly wife of Matthew Huse, making a grant of three virgates of land in the town of Missenden to the church of the Blessed Mary of Missenden and the Canons there serving God. There is also at the British Museum a Chartulary or Lieger Book of the Abbey of Missenden, comprising copies of a variety of documents relating to the possessions of the abbey during the reigns of Henry VII. and Henry VIII.

I hope to publish these Charters in a separate volume if I can give time to the work. They have not yet seen the light, and I cannot but conclude that there are those in the county, or connected with it, who would value these records, as they cannot fail to be of interest, when it is considered that they are not merely associated with the abbey itself, but disclose to us the names of persons and places which blend the early history of Buckinghamshire with the present times. And they have a far wider range of interest than this, claiming, as they may well do, the attention of the general student, inasmuch as they give here and there striking evidence of the habits of the people in the Middle Ages, and particularly of the well-known prevalence of a serfdom, which did not remove the villain or bondman from the position of a slave, either to the person of the Lord of the Manor or to the Manor of which the Lord was the owner. He and his belongings in some of these Charters we find, were the subjects of sale and purchase; we discover the price at which he was valued, and at which he and his were bartered away. I propose to call special attention to any Charter which throws light on this subject, or, indeed, on any customs or usages of special interest.

Returning to the history of the abbey, as I have before said, it forms no exception in the evidence forthcoming to the rule, that a religious house was the coveted spot for the last resting-place of the noble and the distinguished of the times; and I shall make a point of referring to those I find in investigating the Charters, whose bodies were laid in the sacred precincts of Missenden.

I now give a list of the abbots, so far as their succession has at present been brought to light.

ABBOTS OF MISSENDEN.

Daniel was the first abbot,¹ appointed in 1133.

Peter, 1163.

Adam, 1198 and 1206.

William, 1217.

Martin, 1220;² resigned 1235.

Robert was elected in 1236.³

Roger de Eylesbir (Aylesbury), 1240.⁴

Symon de London, 1258;⁵ he resigned in 1262.

Geoffrey de Walpole, or *Walpole*, 1262; 52,

Hen. III.⁶

William de London, admitted 6 Id. Jun., 1267.⁷

Matthew de Tring, 1273.

Richard le Mareschall, 10 Cal. Maii, 1306.⁸

Robert de Kinebal, elected 4 Id. Jun., 1323;⁹ died 1339.

William de la Mere, 6 Non. Mar. 1339.¹⁰

Henry de Bokingham (Buckingham), elected 8 Id. Oct., 1340.¹¹

John de Abyndon (Abingdon).

William de Bradele,¹² on the death of Abyndon, admitted 3 Non. Oct., 1348; resigned 1356.

Ralph Mareschall, admitted 10th June, 1356;¹³ died 1374.

William de Thenford (called *Anthony* in Dods-werth's MSS.) 1374;¹⁴ died 1383.

John Mersh, 22 Oct., 1383.¹⁵

Richard Mear, 22 June, 1398.¹⁶

Robert Risburgh (Risborough), 1466.¹⁷

Henry, 1490 and 1504.¹⁸

William Smith occurs 1513. He died 1521.¹⁹

William Honor, 11 Nov., 1521.²⁰

John Fox, elected 21 Nov., 1528;²¹ who, 5th Sept., 1534, with John Wedon, Prior; John Otwell, Vicar; Will. London, Precentor; Richard

¹ Refer to foundation Charter. ² M.S. Harl., 6950, p. 159.

³ Ibid. ⁴ Ibid., p. 160. ⁵ Ibid., p. 24. ⁶ Ibid., p. 248.

⁷ Ibid., 249. ⁸ Ibid., 6951, p. 204. ⁹ Ibid. ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 205.

¹¹ Ibid. ¹² Ibid., p. 249, also called John. ¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ MS. Harl., 6952, p. 47. ¹⁵ Ibid., p. 48. ¹⁶ Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁷ Ibid., 6972, p. 34. ¹⁸ MS. "Cole," Vol. xxvii., fol. 1756.

¹⁹ Ibid. ²⁰ Ibid. ²¹ Ibid.

Gynger, and nine others, subscribed to the king's supremacy under Seal.

John Otewell, or *Westwick*, was the last abbot.

In going over the names of the abbots we have but little record of their lives. There is one abbot, however, whose evil deeds are not allowed to escape unnoticed; this was Abbot Ralph Mareschall alluded to* in the Patent, 35 Edw. III., p. 2, who, "by treachery, and feloniously counterfeited and clipped the king's money—viz., groats and shillings in his Manor, which was called Legh [the Lee], near Missenden, in the 30th and 31st years of the reign of the king, and he was sentenced to death and to be drawn and hanged, but he was afterwards pardoned by the king. Ruding, upon Lord Coke's assertion, represents the abbot as having been executed for coining." †

After the name of Richard Mear, whose appointment was confirmed in 1398, there is a lapse in the succession till we come to the name of Robert Risburgh in 1466. The names then appear to follow on in regular order, till the dissolution of the monastery at the time when John Otewell or Westwick was the last abbot who surrendered the abbey to the king's Visitors in 1539, although it is very possible there might have been one or more abbots between Robert Risburgh and Henry. Browne Willis, in referring to the hiatus, and without having known the names of Robert Risburgh and his successor, Henry, says, after the name of Richard Mear: "I am at a loss to adjust the succession for the next hundred years, otherwise the series is in all probability entire from the beginning to the year 1400, as it likewise appears to be from 1500 to the dissolution."

I find from Dugdale that the value of the revenues of this monastery in the 26th Henry VIII. was as follows:—

The total value of the temporalities as	}	£	s.	d.
well as the spiritualities		285	15	9
The total amount of all deductions		24	1	2 $\frac{3}{4}$
"Et sic valet, clare per annum"		£261	14	6 $\frac{1}{4}$

* See "Mon. Angl.," Vol. VI., p. 547.

† "Annals of the Coinage of Britain," 8^o Edit., Vol. I., 219.

Otewell, the last abbot, had a pension of £50 assigned to him at the dissolution, and it is inferred that he probably embraced the views of the Reformers, as he did not remain in a state of celibacy, this fact being borne out by his will, bearing date 1558, wherein he makes his wife, Margaret Otewell, alias Westwick, sole executrix, and bequeaths legacies to his son Samuel and his daughter Lettice.

I proceed to give some hitherto unpublished facts relating to this abbey, which I have gained from the Lincoln Register, from which the condition of this religious house in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries may be gleaned. They show the gradual decadence of the religious orders, especially among the smaller communities, and how they so far sank in public estimation that the opposition to Henry VIII. and his commissioners' policy of spoliation was distinctly local, and was indeed a disjointed resistance. The king could never have effected so tremendous a revolution as the dissolution of the monasteries, with all the arbitrary will he possessed, unless there had been a very general acquiescence among the people—unless a feeling prevailed that the monasteries had done their work, and that they must make room for a new order giving expression to new sentiments and resolves then gaining on the mind of the nation.

But before giving the few extracts from the Lincoln Register, to which I have alluded, it is well to call attention to the "Injunctions of John Longland, Bishop of Lincoln 1521 to 1547," relating to our abbey, transcribed from his register, and published in *The Archaeologia* (Vol. XLVII., p. 49, *et seq.*) These injunctions will show, as Mr. Peacock, the writer of the communication remarks, the strong evidence afforded of the decay of monastic discipline; "that an important house of a learned order like that of the Augustinians should have elected as its ruler a man with whom it was necessary for his Bishop to communicate in 'our vulgare Englishe,' on account of his ignorance." The expression of the Bishop at length is, "For that ye be ignorant and have small understanding of Latin we have drawen our said injuncions in our vulgare Englishe tong to the entent ye should the better

understand and know them, and too see them more surely observed and kepte in every parte." These injunctions are well worth perusing. They leave with us the impression of the idleness of the monks, of the looseness of morals which then prevailed in the community, and of the gross negligence which allowed the buildings of the monastery to fall into decay. The Bishop gives this timely warning: "That thou be more ware in thy household keeping, sparing some dishe from thy own borde, and likewise from thy chanons, till tyme thou bring the said house in state agayne, as thou haste by thy negligency brought itt in de kaye." Perhaps the strongest evidence of the demoralised state of this abbey at the time of these injunctions is that the monks appear to have disused the habit of the Order. The abbot and prior are enjoined, under pain of excommunication, not henceforth to suffer their brethren "To use or were eny garded or welted hose or stuffed codpese or jerkyn or eny other shorte or courtely fashioned garments, but that ye see your said brederen do use their apparell on every parte religiously, and that ther kirtells be from hensforth in length att the leste down to the ancle or longer." These injunctions are dated the 27th June, 1531.

I conclude this paper with extracts from the Visitations from the Lincoln Register. They are in Latin, but the abstract of them is given in English. I regret I am unable to reproduce part of the Visitation of 10th October, 1530, and the greater part of the special Visitation made by the Bishop on the 29th June, 1531, as the charges against some of the monks are of too gross a character for publication. Whilst it is of the utmost importance that we should have the facts before us from original documents, if we are to judge of the history of the times and of the condition of the particular religious house to which our attention is directed, it is only just to remark that we must view the Episcopal Visitations and injunctions to which I am referring as recording not the normal condition of the abbey, but its condition on the decline of discipline in the last stage of its existence, and, therefore, under the most unfavourable aspect.

I am still collecting information connected with the

Abbey of Missenden, which will be, in any case, of no little interest to the antiquary; and, it may be, if leisure is afforded me, that I may again return to the subject of the history of this religious house in the pages of THE RECORDS.

Mussenden.

[Bishop Beaufort's Register, fo. 30.]

Deed of William, Abbot of S. Mary's, Mussenden, and the Convent of the same place, whereby in consideration of the Manor of Netherbury, &c., granted by Sir John Cheyne, of Isnamsted, Knt., with the consent of Amicia Lenversy, his cousin (*consanguinea*), to William de Burghbrugge, Wm. de Hanley, John Bryan, Nichs. Gerneys, Clk., John Rede, John de Merston, sen., John de Corbrygg, and John de Thenford, and their heirs, to be granted to the monastery. The monastery bind themselves and their successors to celebrate masses, &c., at the altar in the Chapel of S. Augustine, within the monastery, for the good estate of the said Sir John and Amicia, John Cheyne, jun., Elizth, his wife, and his brother Alex^r. Cheyne, while they live, with the collect, "Deus qui carebat," &c., and to specially bare them in remembrance in the Canon of the Mass, and after their death for their souls, and for the souls of Alexander, father of said John, and Margaret his mother, Alienora, Elizth, and Christiana, wives of said John, and his sons and daughters, and Bartholomew Cheyne, and Alice his wife and all their parents, also of Edward de Mouns, Tho^s. Seynt Croys, Geoffrey and John Lenvers, knights, and for the souls of all the faithful departed.

Long deed. Four copies to be made: one to be kept in the Registry of the Bp. of Lincoln, the second in that of the Archbp. of Canterbury, the third in the Registry of the Monastery, and the fourth in the custody of the said Sir John Cheyne.

Dated 25 Feb., 1080 [?]. "Millesimo octogesimo," but query an error. It is the 3rd year of Pope Urban VI.

Mussenden.

[Bishop Gray's Injunctions, 1432.]

Because you are not able, on account of the fewness of your Canons, to perform daily and nightly services according to the rule of your order, we enjoin you to cause the number to be increased as speedily as possible.

We enjoin your Abbot to render an account of your administration every year between Michaelmas and Martinmas, before the whole Monastery in Chapter.

Also to rebuild some old houses, &c., on the monastic estates.

To grant no conodies, fees, or annuities, without our special licence and the consent of the Monastery in Chapter.

To cut or sell no timber without the like licence and consent.

Myssenden.

Visitation held there Tuesday, April 20, 1518, in the Chapter House, by the Rev. Father in God, William Atwater, by the Grace of God Bishop of Lincoln, in the 4th year of his consecration.

The Abbot and Convent have the Churches of Gt. Missenden, Chalfonte Peter, and Gt. Kynshell appropriated to them.

They have also the patronage of the churches of Aldebury and Huntingdon.

The Canons of the monastery frequently go into the town of Missenden. My Lord enjoins the Abbot and Prior henceforth under no pretence to allow their brethren to go out into the town of Missenden without special licence, and that they shall not lightly grant such licences.

It was also enjoined to the Abbot that he should cause to be prepared some suitable building [*honestam domum*] for the Canons, in which they can eat together and have readings until the refectory shall be repaired, and that as speedily as possible he shall cause the refectory to be properly repaired.

The Abbot was enjoined immediately after this Visitation to provide a house and beds for sick Canons in the infirmary, and other necessaries for them at all times, day and night, as often as need should be during their sickness, and servants or guardians for them.

The Abbot was enjoined to cause the number of priests there to be augmented, unless there are at least five priests.

Let permission be given that some house within the monastery be assigned where the Canons can eat with their relatives and friends, if perchance they come thither twice or three times in the year.

It is said that Dom. John Johns, late of Lisnes, now sojourning in the monastery, "non est utilis monasterio."

Rd. Gynger, novice, gives himself too much to ease, and does not study, "nec intelligit nec vacat divinis." He was enjoined henceforth to reform himself in the premises and to occupy himself laudably.

My Lord enjoined the Abbot to provide that there should be a lamp or other light burning before the sacrament within the convent church.

The pincerna is not ready to minister to the Canons, but often absents himself and uses abusive language to the Canons. The Abbot was enjoined to cause this to be amended, and that all the servants of the monastery bear themselves properly towards the Canons.

The Abbot was enjoined henceforth every year to render an account of his administration, in order to make the Canons assured as to the estate of the monastery.

The same day, year, and place, the said Reverend Father, sitting judicially in the Chapter House, dissolved his Visitation.

Messydyn.

Visitation, Monday, 10 Oct., 1530, by Magister
Thos. Jackman, Commissary of the Bishop of
Lincoln.

Dom. JOHN FOX, Abbot.
 „ JOHN WEDON, Prior.
 „ JOHN ATTEWELL, Vic.
 „ W^m. LONDON, Chanter.
 „ RIC. GYNGER, Sub-Chanter.
 „ THOS. BERNERD, Coquinarius.
 „ ROGER PALMER, Refectorarius.
 „ RIC. HIDE, Sacristan.
 „ JOHN SLYTHURSTE.
 JOHN AMERY
 RIC. ESTE
 JO. WESTWYKE
 W^m. WALLER
 W^m. GODDISTOWE

} Novices.

The Abbot says that the church and other buildings of the monastery are out of repair [*in decasu*].

Also that the Canons have no Scripture Lessons read to them in the refectory except during Advent and Lent.

The gate within the nave of the church and choir is not closed, so that laics can enter the choir at their will.

He says also that the house is burdened with a debt of 60^{li}.

Dom. John Wedon, the Prior, says that the buildings are much out of repair.

Dom. John Attewell says that the cloister needs repair.

Dom. Wm. London says the same.

Dom. Ric. Gynger says that John Compton cuts down trees on the monastery lands at his pleasure, and without supervision from anyone in the monastery.

And that the Canons do not know the bounds and limits of the lands and possessions of the monastery, nor do any of them superintend them. Nor have they a book or rental, showing the lands.

On the 29th June, 1531, the Bishop himself made a
Special Visitation of the Monastery.

Dom. John Fox answers to the articles charged against him.
Ad primum articulum respondet et fatetur.

To the ixth he answers and confesses that he sold wood at Chalfonte and other places on the monastery lands for 60^{li}, and as to the non-repair he answers in the negative.

To the xth he answers that the Rectory of Chalfont S. Peter is worth xi^{li}, and lands in Myssenden held by copy of court roll by the custom of the manor Arnolds, xx^s, and Dytmylks felde, xxvj^s. viij^d.

Dom. Roger Palmer respondet et fatetur, &c.

Other witnesses depose that they have seen the said Palmer coming from Byshope's house in Missenden in the middle of the night, in the habit of a layman, "in his doblet and a jerkyn, with a sword by his side," etc.

I am indebted to Mr. Roundell Sanderson, of the British Museum, for the following note on the seal of the Abbey of Missenden, an illustration of which accompanies this paper:—

"Of those seals preserved in the British Museum, the best impression is that numbered LIX. 92, a sulphur cast, green. Its shape is oval-pointed. Design: A rude figure of the Virgin Mary, seated, wearing a crown ornamented with fleur-de-lis, the fore-arms pointing upwards, the left hand holding a sceptre with a bird on its summit,* and the right holding something similar, on the top of which is a fleur-de-lis,† her feet resting on a footstool. The Holy Child is represented sitting on her lap—the mother's lap may be described as a throne on which He is seated. His head is decorated with a nimbus, on which, at each side and at the top, the extremities of the arms of a cross show themselves—in short, a cruciform nimbus adorns His head.

"The legend reads: 'SIGILLV. SCE MARIE DE MISSENDENA.'"

* The illustration fails to show the bird.

† Or possibly the stem and blossom of a lily.