



Letters of the last Abbot of Reading.

From Originals among the State Papers.

By Nathaniel Hone.

HUGH FARINGDON (*alias* Cook), the last of a long line of mitred Abbots who ruled over the Benedictine House at Reading for a period of over four centuries, laid down his life for conscience sake* before his own Abbey gate, on the 15th Nov., 1539. Nothing is known of his birth and parentage, but probably he was a native of the Berkshire town, from which he took his name. At the death of Abbot Thomas Worcester in July, 1520, he was serving the office of sub-chamberlain of his Abbey, and was elected by his brethren to fill the vacancy. By a letter in the Cotton collection we find that this election was confirmed in the following November, John Clerk, a priest of Windsor, writing to Cardinal Wolsey, says:—"Master dean of Sarum and I was at the Abbot of Reading's confirmation, the which was solemnly done at Reading by the bishop's officers upon Wednesday last past . . . The same day after the confirmation, the Abbot was blessed by the Bishop's suffragan, who was also come thither for that purpose, the next day after he was solemnly installed, and upon Friday night about 5 of the clock the King's grace came thither, and the Abbot was then ready to bid his grace welcome, and upon Saturday morning gave his grace a goodly present of great pykes, great carps, salmon, sturgeon and other fish." (Titus B.I. f. 307.) The following are transcripts of his letters still extant among the State Papers, and all in an excellent state of preservation:—

ABBOT OF READING TO CROMWELL.

[*S. P. Dom. Hen. VIII.* vol. vi. 943.]

Withe dewe recomendacon had onto yo^r Mastershipp, pleasith it the same to be advertised, that of late I have received yo^r most gentle and lovyng lettrez, for

* The Abbot, together with two of his brethren, John Eynon and John Rugg, is included in the Decree of Beatification recently published by the Roman Congregation of Rites, dated 13 May, 1895.

the whiche I rendre onto you right hartie thanks, theffecte of the which yo^r seid lettere conserneth Dan John Shirbourne, late priour of hous. And wheras it hath pleased you to requyre the seid Dan John Shirbourne to be restored and taken as one of our bretherne, whiche thyng is clene contrarie to hys mynde and entent, As hit shall appere in a lettere of his hand wrytyng whiche by this berer I have here send you. I had provided and gotten for hym a benefice well worthe xx. marks by the yere, whiche he hath otterly refused. This berer, my servaunt, can shew you ferther in the premisses, to whome I beseche you gyve credence. And in this matter and in all other, I am and hooly shall be at yo^r comaundement, As knoweth the holy gost who encrease you in worshipp. At Redyng the vth day of this present monethe of August [1533], ffrom yo^rs assuredly,

Hugh Abbat, ther.

To the right worshippfull Maister Cromwell, one of the King's most honorable counsaill, this be delyvered w^t spede.

ABBOT OF READING TO LORD LISLE.

[*Lisle Papers*, vij. 4.]

My singler good lord, in my most hearty wise I have me recomaunded vnto yo^r good lordshipp. Rendryng vnto you most hartie thanks for the manyfolde and contynvwall gentilnes toward me shewed, and have received yo^r lordshippes letter. And as consarning yo^r yong gentleman* because I wold he shuld be well sene vnto by a woman, for his dressyng and orderyng, for because as yet he is to yong to shifte for hym self, I have sett him w^t Willm Edmunds my vndersteward, wher I waraunt you he is well ordred. And I assure yo^r lordshipp he is the most towardly child in lernyng and other his qualities that I have knowen. And wher it pleasith yo^r lordshipp to write to me that If I nede any wyne or heryng, yo^r lordshipp will prepare for me. My lord if hit shall be yo^r pleasure that I may have iiij Tunne of Red and Claret I shall se yo^r lordshipp therfor contented. And also shall be veray glad to take of yo^r lordshippes gifte, one barell of heryng for myne owne etyng, how dere so ever they be. And as yo^r owne, ye shall so fynde me. As knowith Almyghtie god, who encrease yo^r lordshipp w^t muche honor to his pleasure. At Redyng the xxth day of November [1534] from hym that is at yo^r lordshippes comaundement.

My lord I beseche yo^r lordshipp at this my desire to be good lord vnto one William Payn whiche hath been my servaunt this iiij yeres or ther a bout. I assure yo^r lordshipp he is an honest man and can shote well, hunt well and keep hounds w^t divers other good qualities like an honest serving man.

Hugh Abbat, ther.

To my very singler good lord my lord Lisle this be delyvered.

Endorsed—My lord of Reding, the xxth of Novembre, 1534.

Another letter of the same date, couched in similar terms, is addressed to Lady Lisle, mentioning "the young gentleman her son is in good health."

* James Basset, son of Lady Lisle by a former husband, who had been sent to be educated at the Abbey School.

ABBOTT OF READING TO CROMWELL.

[*S. P. Dom. Hen. VIII.* vol. vii., 1544.]

My dewtie onto yo^r Maistershipp lowlie remembred, with like thanks for yo^r benivolent goodnes towards me and my bretherne yo^r contynowall bedemen extendid and shewed; hit may please you to onderstand that I and my seid bretherne of our mere mocion and good myndes that wee bere towards yo^r Maistershipp, have frely gyven and sent you by the berer a patent onder our covent seale of one Annuytie of xx. marks yerely for terme of yo^r life to be taken w^{thin} our maner of Aston in the countie of Hertford, as in the seid patent hit doth appere, which smale gift we yo^r seid bedemen lowlie beseche yo^r Mastershipp to accepte and take which ye shall be assured to have with as good harts and wills as we can devise, wth our contynowall prayours as knoweth Almighty God, who encrease yo^r Maistershipp wth muche honor. At Redyng the xv. day of this present moneth of Decembre [1534].

You^{rs} assurydly,

Hugh Abbat, ther.

To the right honorable Maister Crumwell, secretarie unto the Kyng's hyghnes, this be delyvered.

Endorsed—The Abbot of Redyng, his letter.

On Cromwell's attainment to power, the above payment of pension seems to have been a common practice among the heads of religious houses, to gain the favour of the Lord Keeper in the threatening storm.

ABBOT OF READING TO MORYSIN.

[*S. P. Dom. Hen. VIII.* vol. xi., 1270.]

With harty recomendations onto you. Acertyng yo^u that I have recevide from you ij. letters, wryttyn in the faver of oon Graye that was sume tyme my servant. Well perceving by yo^r letters that you are hys ffrynde, and Sir in this case I shall gently desyer yo^u nott to be dyscontented with me thogh yo^r request be nott grawntede, for I well perseve he ys to you a harde sweter. Also I perceve by yo^r letter that he hath enformyde you that sume about me ar nott hys ffrynds, to that, I knowe none but that he shulde do well, every oon of hys aqueyntans wyll be glad. Knowyng my mynde so oft as I have shewd hytt to hym, I mervell that he can be a suter to any man for any serves to me. I mervell that he blushe nott at hytt, for he knowes that I wyll nott have hys serves yf he wolde geve hytt to me, but he entendyth too prove hym self a trew man, for that he hath made hys vaunt, that he wyll be my servaunt whether I wyll or noo. Sir, Impute not me oncharytable in thys denyall, for I have many causes so to do, as, knowyth gode, who kepe you to hys plesuer. ffrom Redyng the daye of the conception of oure Ladye [8 Dec., 1536].

by the Abbot, ther.

To Mr. Morysyn be thys delyveryd.

(*To be continued.*)