

THE DISSOLUTION OF THE KENTISH MONASTERIES.

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PRECISELY four hundred years ago, in October, 1535, the wheels were being set in motion for a change which was to alter in a very marked way the life of our county and of the whole realm. The commissioners of Thomas Cromwell were at work in the land; the plundering of the ancient monastic houses of England had been decided upon by an extravagant and needy King and his subservient coadjutor. It is as an attempt, at this fourth centenary of the event, to describe the circumstances of the Suppression in our own county, to deal in some measure with the means employed to bring about so far-reaching a change, and to recall some of the personalities involved, as glimpses of them are afforded by incomplete and sometimes obscure records, that this paper is written.

First it should in fairness be said that King Henry VIII, in reaching a decision as to his attitude towards the monasteries, had certain precedents to go upon. As early as the reign of Henry IV a project was raised, but came to nothing, for the secularization of all the property of the church, and earlier still, in the fourteenth century, the dissolution of the monkish order of Knights Templar had been followed by sporadic suppressions, and seizures of revenues, of the alien priories. Henry V began to suppress these in earnest during his wars with France, using some of the revenues which he obtained in the process for the founding of other religious houses, e.g. Shene Charterhouse in Surrey, founded in 1414 and destined to be one of the greatest thorns in the flesh of Henry VIII over the divorce question; and his policy was followed up by his successor, Henry VI. The latter, being a truly religious man, and also, as is well known, a person greatly interested in education, used the revenues

of many of the dissolved alien priories for the endowment of his colleges of Eton and King's. This seems to have been the starting point of the suppressions carried out with the object of obtaining money for the founding of colleges, which became increasingly frequent during the second half of the fifteenth century and the first quarter of the sixteenth, culminating in Cardinal Wolsey's extensive dissolutions in 1525.

Some of the alien priories, among them Monks Horton, which was Cluniac, and Patrixbourne, near Canterbury, a cell of the Abbey of Beaulieu in Normandy, managed to obtain permission to continue their existence under English priors, but the majority shared the common fate. Kentish houses suppressed in or before 1414 included the priory of Lewisham, a cell of St. Peter's Abbey at Ghent since the time of King Alfred; Throwley near Faversham, a cell of the famous old Abbey of St. Bertin at St. Omer, which had large possessions in Kent; and the Cistercian alien priory of New Romney, a cell of Pontigny Abbey near Auxerre, the great house so intimately associated with two Archbishops of Canterbury, St. Thomas and St. Edmund Rich. The revenues of these establishments were all used for religious or educational purposes. Those of Lewisham formed part of the endowment of Shene Charterhouse; the estate of Throwley went to the nunnery of Sion at Isleworth, on the Thames; and New Romney was given by Henry VI to All Souls' College, Oxford.

The number of alien priories was, however, limited; they were not usually at all richly endowed; the last of those not made denizen was closed by 1414; and, though the revenue obtained was not dissipated all at once, the time inevitably came, and that in no long space, when this source of income for the founding of new educational establishments was exhausted. It was time then to begin upon the native English houses, and we find, for example, Jesus College, Cambridge, in 1497 founded with the revenues, and in the buildings, of the dissolved nunnery of St. Radegund. In 1522, Bishop Fisher of Rochester, who as executor of

Lady Margaret Beaufort was engaged upon the founding of St. John's College at Cambridge, was able to add to the endowment the estates of the Kentish nunnery of Lillechurch, a house founded by King Stephen about 1150.

The case of Lillechurch is worth more than passing mention, for it illustrates one of the causes which made possible the general dissolution. The monasteries of England had, it is clear, never wholly recovered from the disastrous visitation of the Black Death in 1349. At that time the mortality among the clergy was appalling, and of the religious houses some were entirely emptied, and all suffered terribly. In many monasteries the full complement of monks or nuns was never again reached, and at the beginning of the sixteenth century it was not uncommon to find five or even fewer religious in the smaller establishments. At Davington Priory in 1535 the convent consisted of the Prioress, one nun, and a lay sister; the Prioress and the nun died, and the lay sister deserted the place. Davington Priory was thus never dissolved, but fell to the Crown from the desertion of its inmates. In these circumstances (and Davington is not an isolated example) who can wonder that corruption, as at Lillechurch, sometimes crept in? That place, we learn from contemporary documents, was "situated in a corner out of sight of the public, and was much frequented by lewd persons, especially clerks, whereby the nuns there were notorious for the incontinence of their life." A careful enquiry was made by Bishop Fisher, and much documentary evidence respecting this period of the Priory's history has survived. This reveals that there had been no prioress since 1520; the convent consisted of but three nuns, and of these two had borne children to the Vicar of Higham, Edward Sterope. "Some witnesses were heard as to one of them, including a nurse who had taken charge of her baby and a former servant of the nunnery, who had been sent by the bishop to investigate the matter. He entered the cloister of the aforesaid priory where he saw the lady sitting and weeping, and said to her "Alas madam, howe happened this with you?" and she answered him "And [if] I had been happy [*i.e.*, lucky]

I myght a caused this thinge to have ben unknowen and hydden."'¹

Signs of unrest were not wanting in some of the other monasteries of Kent during the first quarter of the sixteenth century. As early as 1512-13 John, Abbot of Boxley, appealed to the Crown for the arrest of four of his monks, William Milton, William Sandwich, Robert Blechenden and John Farham, as "rebellious and apostate."² At the same Abbey in 1522 there was another incident, which prompted the following letter from Archbishop Warham to Cardinal Wolsey: "Pleace it your good grace to understand that a certaine preest, called S'r Adam Bradshawe, whom I send now unto your good Lordship, was put into prison at Maidstone for his great presumption in pulling down and breking of suche writings and seales as were set up at the Abbey at Boxley against the yl opinions of Martine Luther. Which preeste, being this in prison, hath written and caused to bee cast into the highe stret at Maidstone verie sedicious billes against the Kinges grace most honorable consail and other estates of this realm."³

In 1524 Cardinal Wolsey was engaged upon his project for the founding of two great colleges at Oxford and Ipswich, and for the former he secured the buildings and estates of the Priory of St. Frideswide at Oxford. To provide the endowments of the two colleges the Cardinal obtained leave from the Pope to suppress some twenty-five monasteries, two of which, Tonbridge and Lesnes, were in Kent, and another, the Premonstratensian Abbey of Bayham, was actually partly in Kent and partly in Sussex, the gatehouse being on one side and the main buildings on the other side of the stream dividing the two counties. Wolsey had much difficulty in Rome in obtaining permission for his action, and in England it met with considerable opposition. At Tonbridge in 1525 the townspeople protested vigorously at

¹ Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, 1922, p. 603, quoting Dugdale, *Monasticon*, iv, 378.

² Chan. Warrants, 1761.

³ *Calendar*, iv (3), 1353.

the dissolution of the Priory, and when Archbishop Warham, who was commissioned by Wolsey to meet the complainants, had argued with them for several days, they persisted in their view that "they would rather have the said place not suppressed, if it might stand with the King's pleasure".¹ Their opposition was confined to verbal remonstrance, but at Bayham Abbey, a few miles further south, there was a serious disturbance, the people of the neighbourhood assembling in "a riotous company, disguised and unknown, with painted faces", and masked. The agents engaged upon the suppression were driven from the Abbey, and the rioters reinstated the canons, begging them to toll their bell if they were again molested and pledging themselves to come in force to their assistance.²

Practically nothing is known as to the circumstances of the suppression of Lesnes Abbey beyond the following note in Thorpe's *Registrum Roffense*: "Memorandum.—That on the 1st day of April, A.D. 1525, the Most Reverend Father . . . Cardinal of York, etc. . . . with the express consent and free will of Dom William Tysehurst, formerly Abbot, the Reverend Father John, Bishop of Rochester, consenting thereto, suppressed and dissolved the monastery of Lesnes, in the diocese of Rochester, of the Order of St. Augustine."³

Stories were carried to the king of the harsh and unjust way in which Wolsey's agents, Dr. Allen and Thomas Cromwell, were carrying on their work, and Archbishop Warham, in July, 1525, wrote to the Cardinal about the unpopularity of his policy in Kent. Moreover, the fall of the monasteries dissolved at this time, as Fuller tells us, "made all the forest of religious foundations in England to shake, justly fearing that the King would fell the oaks when the Cardinal had begun to cut the underwood".

It was, no doubt, this policy of Wolsey's which gave Henry VIII the idea of a more sweeping measure; and after

¹ *Calendar*, iii, 1470, 1471.

² *Gasquet*, 20.

³ Thorpe, *Registrum Roffense*, 342.

the fall of the Cardinal came the rise to power of the ruthless Thomas Cromwell, a person of the lowest extraction and one quite dead to any feeling of honour or pity, who had been engaged upon the work under Wolsey and had seen how helpless the monasteries would be before a determined attack. The King was glad of any excuse for attacking those who were at once the vigorous opponents of his divorce and the last strongholds of Papal power in England, while an irresistible attraction was presented to him by the wealth of the religious houses. Many of them had been mismanaged and had got into debt, but the aggregate wealth was still enormous, while the costly vestments, jewels and plate represented a vast sum of money. One has only to read the inventories, printed in Vol. VII of *Archæologia Cantiana*, of the goods of the Priories of Dover and of Minster in Sheppey to realize what treasures were stored up even in the smaller and less wealthy monasteries. I have reached the conclusion that the religious houses of Kent before the Dissolution were worth in yearly revenue rather more than £7,000 of the time, which represents over £70,000 a year at present-day values.

The parliament which met in January, 1534, was chiefly occupied in passing legislation against the exercise of Papal power in England. Chapuys, the Imperial Ambassador, always well informed as to the acts and intentions of Henry, writing the following month to the Emperor Charles V, says that the Commons had taken away all authority from the Holy See, and given to the Crown power to nominate to vacant bishoprics. He adds significantly that "the king is very covetous of the goods of the church, which he already considers as his patrimony". Before Easter he again writes that the Lords, "to the great regret of good men, who are in a minority", had been obliged, "owing to the threats and practices of the king", to ratify these enactments of the lower house.¹

Among the Acts of this parliament was a measure transferring authority over the religious houses from the Pope to the King. Cromwell at once redoubled attempts

¹ *Gasquet*, 45, quoting *Calendar*, vii, 171, 373.

which he had already begun to introduce his own nominees to monastic offices. "Pleaseth your mastership to have in remembrance," wrote Elizabeth Cressener, Prioress of Dartford, "that of late you sent me your letter for the office of our high steward, for a servant of yours, one Mr. Palmer, and at that time I was so bold to write to your mastership my mind, and all my sisters, in that cause; certifying your good mastership that we never had none that occupied that room but such as hath been of the king's grace's most noble council, as sir Reynold Bray, sir John Shaw, Mr Hugh Denys, sir John Heron, and now sir Robert Dymmock, who hath surrendered into our hands the said office. Wherefore, if we durst be so bold, we would beseech you to accept such a poor gift, given to your good mastership by your poor beadwomen, with the fee thereunto belonging."¹

Immediately following the provisions made by the parliament of 1534, commissioners were dispatched by Cromwell to administer the oath of supremacy to the inmates of the monasteries, and at the same time to foment discontent among the religious and to try to obtain evidence which might be used against the monks. Refusal to take the oath on the part of the London Carthusians led to their imprisonment and death, and almost equally drastic was the treatment meted out to the Observant friars of Greenwich and Canterbury. These Observants were members of a reformed branch of the Franciscan Order, and were noted for their piety and holiness of life. Not only did they refuse resolutely to acknowledge the King's supremacy in other than temporal matters, but the Greenwich house occupied a unique position, in that one of its most prominent inmates, Father John Forest, was personal confessor to Queen Catherine, and her warm champion in the affair of the divorce. The King had thus no reason to love the Greenwich friary, though it was situated close to his palace, and had many points of contact with the court and the Royal family. On March 12th, 1513, Henry had himself written to Pope Leo X declaring his great affection for the convent, who were

¹ Wood, ii, 154-5.

occupied "in hard toil by night and day" to win sinners back to God.¹

Early in May, 1533, however, a member of the convent, Father Peto, had to preach before the King, and did not hesitate to speak his mind on the subject of the divorce. The King, it is recorded, "suffered him patiently", but the following Sunday engaged one of his upholders, Dr. Curwen, later Bishop of Oxford, to deliver a sermon refuting Peto's arguments. Stow describes the ensuing scene, and tells us how Curwen "sharply reprehended Peto and his preaching, and called him dog, slanderer, base, beggarly friar, closeman, rebel and traitor, saying that no subject should speak so audaciously to princes. . . . And then, supposing to have utterly suppressed Peto and his partakers, lifted up his voice and said: 'I speak to thee, Peto, who makest thyself Micheas, that thou mayest speak evil of kings, but now thou art not to be found, being fled for fear and shame, as being unable to answer my arguments.'"

At this moment the tables were turned, when another of the Greenwich brethren, Father Elstow, leaned over from the rood-loft, and not only defended his absent brother, who, he said, as Curwen well knew, had gone to a provincial chapter at Canterbury and was returning the next day, but also accused Curwen himself of acting as he did through hope of preferment. "This Elstow," continues Stow, "waxed hot and spake very earnestly, so that they could not make him cease his speech until the king himself bade him hold his peace."² "At the hearing [of the speech]" says Harpsfield, "the king was cast into a great choler, and in a great heat commanded that these friars should be conveyed thither where he should never hear more of them."³

The following day Peto and Elstow were brought before the Council, when Elstow again boldly replied to the threats of Henry Bourchier, Earl of Essex.⁴ These two friars

¹ Gasquet, 46-7, quoting Ellis, *Original Letters*, 3rd Ser., i, 165.

² Stow, *Annals*, 559.

³ Harpsfield, *The Pretended Divorce* (Camden Soc.), p. 204.

⁴ Gasquet, 49.

escaped with a reprimand and the punishment of exile from England, but Father Forest was eventually executed. The convent refused to take the oath of supremacy, and the Greenwich friary was dissolved on August 11th, 1534.

The position of the Franciscan house at Canterbury at this time is more obscure. The convent was already in trouble through the association of some of its members with Elizabeth Barton, the "Holy Maid of Kent", and two of them, Hugh Rich, "late warden of the fryers Observaunt of Canterbury", together with Father Risby, are included in the Act of Attainder against the Maid and were executed at Tyburn on April 20th, 1534.¹ Before this some of the Canterbury friars seem to have gone to Antwerp to join Peto, and probably Elstow, after their expulsion from Greenwich. On June 30th, 1533, John Coke, Clerk to the Merchant Adventurers at Antwerp, wrote to Cromwell that "Friar Petowe and other friars of Greenwich, Richmond and Canterbury" were in that city, writing books against the king's marriage with Anne Boleyn.²

Although on August 29th Chapuys wrote to the Emperor that "all the Observants have been driven out of their monasteries for refusing the oath against the Holy See,"³ the convent at Canterbury seems to have made terms with the King, and to have continued until 1538. That its members did not entirely surrender their opinions is shown by the fact that in March, 1535, "Arthur, Grey Friar of Canterbury" preached "seditiously" in Herne church⁴; and on November 8th, 1535, Friar John Arthur, in a letter to one Prow, states that he was "appointed Warden of the Grey Friars, Canterbury, by the king, against the heart of the Provincial; kept observance somewhat strict because they rebelled against the king and held so stiffly to the Bishop of Rome",

¹ *Calendar*, vii, 522.

² *Ibid.*, vi, 726.

³ *Ibid.*, vii, 1095.

⁴ *Ibid.*, viii, 480.

for which he daily reproved them. Finally he lost favour and fled to Dieppe, whence he wrote complaining that his mortal enemy had been made Warden in his stead.¹

In December, 1537, Richard Ingworth, the newly appointed Suffragan of Dover, received from Cromwell two commissions, charging him to visit the English friaries and (1) to depose or suspend incriminated superiors, and (2) to take possession of the keys of their convents, to sequester goods, and to make indentures and inventories.² Active suppression of the houses of friars was begun in the autumn of the following year, 1538, and on December 15th Ingworth was able to write the following letter to Cromwell: "My syngular good lorde, in my humble manner, pleseyth youe to understonde that I have receyueyd the howse of Whyte fryers in Aylyforde³ in to the Kyngs hands, and the XIII day of December I cam to Canterbury, wher yt I fynde iii howseys, more in dett than all yt thay have is abull to pay, and specyally ye Austen fryers . . . the black and grey be abull wt their implements to pay ther detts and for owr costs, and lytill more . . . and so this Sunday I woll make an ende in Canterbury, and on Munday to Sandwyche."⁴

On the previous day, December 14th, Ingworth had procured the arrest of a member of the Austin friars' convent, Friar Stone, who had "very rudely and traitorously used him before all the company",⁵ and who was subsequently executed, the expenses of the execution being detailed in the Canterbury City Accounts.⁶

In carrying the story of the friaries to its conclusion I have omitted the details of the dissolution of the regular monasteries. There is little doubt that by 1535 the suppression of all the monasteries in England had been decided upon by Cromwell and his master, and in that year four

¹ *Arch. Cant.*, xxxiv, 88.

² *Gasquet*, 313.

³ Aylesford.

⁴ *Calendar*, xiii, pt. ii, 1058.

⁵ Ellis, *Orig. Letters*, 3rd Ser., iii, 181.

⁶ Hist. MSS. Commn., 9th Report, append., 153.

commissioners were appointed to make a visitation throughout the realm, and to send to Cromwell particulars of the conditions in the religious houses. Many of their reports, which were called *comperta*, still exist, and in the opinion of the highest modern authorities there is no doubt whatever that they are full of the inventions of the men sent round to collect them, who knew that unless information of the required character was forthcoming they would lose their posts. Among the duties of these commissioners was that of dismissing all religious under twenty-four years of age, or who had been professed under the age of twenty. The hardship and distress caused by such a measure weighed not at all with those who had to carry it out, though many piteous letters were written to Cromwell in an attempt to secure exemption. "I have received your gentle and loving letter", wrote Joanna Vane, Prioress of Dartford, "touching the delivery of one Bridget Browning, one of my religious company, as yet not professed in the sight of the world, but only in heart to God, who was brought to my monastery long time past, only by the great labour, means, and request, made by her mother to the late prioress of the said monastery now deceased,¹ to the intent she should be a religious woman and recluse, and nothing at the desire or request of the said late prioress, neither by her provocation, neither yet by her nor me detained or kept against her friends' minds, contrary to any statute, decree, or ordinance, in that behalf provided; but that the said late prioress, I, and my sisters, have always been ready to permit and suffer the said Bridget to depart to her said mother at her free will and liberty; which to do she always, being very sore prefixed in her outward mind, and also as it should seem in her heart to my said religion, hath refused and denied. Wherefore it may please your good lordship that she may come to your lordship's presence, and that the effects of her heart and mind may be by your good lordship tenderly accepted and heard; and farther she to be remitted as it shall appertain to your good lordship's great wisdom and authority. Wherein your good lordship

¹ Elizabeth Cressener.

shall bind me and all other my sisters to be your lordship's daily oratrices."¹

Margaret Vernon, Prioress of Little Marlow in Bucks, had her house almost emptied at this time. Its suppression quickly followed, and the Prioress, who seems to have been on terms of some intimacy with Cromwell and had been governess to his son, was appointed Abbess of West Malling in Kent, the reigning Abbess, Elizabeth Rede, apparently being obliged to resign in her favour. Elizabeth had already displeased Cromwell by refusing to appoint his nephew Richard steward of the Abbey,² and he showed her no mercy. Sir Thomas Willoughby attempted to propitiate the all-powerful minister on her behalf. "Also, my lord," he wrote, "my wife's sister, dame Elizabeth Rede, your beadwoman, humbly beseeches your good lordship to have your letter to my lady abbess of Malling, that she at your contemplation will be so good to her as to appoint her that room and lodging within the said monastery that she and other of her predecessors that hath likewise resigned hath used to have, and as she had herself a little space, or else some other meet and convenient lodging in the same house; not only that, but such plate as my father-in-law did deliver her to occupy in her chamber, that she may have it again."³

The names of the commissioners appointed to undertake the visitation of 1535 were Layton, Legh, Ap Rice and London, and to Dr. Layton was assigned the territory which included Kent. On October 23rd, 1535, he arrived at the Abbey of Langdon in East Kent, and is said to have found the Abbot in compromising circumstances. This story is given in full by Wright⁴; true or not, even Layton seems upon reflection to have had little faith in it, for in a letter written the same night from Christchurch, Canterbury, he first describes the fire which took place in that monastery

¹ Wood, iii, 86.

² *Ibid.*, ii, 151-2.

³ *Ibid.*, ii, 153.

⁴ Wright, *Letters relating to the Suppression of the Monasteries* (Camden Soc.), 75.

on the night of his arrival, and then proceeds to report very unfavourably of Dover, Folkestone, and Langdon; but though he gives the worst possible character to the Abbot of Langdon, William Dare, and calls him "the drunkenest knave living", he makes no reference to his exploit earlier in the day. "The whole community are, in fact," says Cardinal Gasquet in relating the story, "included in one of Layton's usual sweeping charges of immorality."¹

On November 16th, 1535, three commissioners, Thomas Bedyll, "Herry" Polsted, and John Anthony, received the surrender of Langdon Abbey in the chapter house of the monastery. They reported badly of the Abbot's administration, but brought no graver charges against him, even recommending him for a pension, which was subsequently granted. "The house of Langdon", they wrote, "is sore in decaye, and no maner of grayne or other vitalles for the realeff of the house. Thabbot therof (as he is reported) a veray unthrifte yvell housbond, and of yll rule, and his covent veraye ignorant and poore."²

These commissioners, who were quite distinct from Layton and his mission, at the same time reported upon Dover and Folkestone Priors, which were also forced quite illegally into surrender at this time. "The house of Dovour", they wrote, "is a goodly house and well repayred in all places as fer as we could perceyve; and that the prior (as it was reported unto us) ffound the house at his ffyrst comyng thither indented in ix^{xx} li., and hath reduced and brought that to Cⁱⁱ as itt is said, of whose nowe case dyverse of the honest inhabitantes of Dovour shewe them selves veray sorry." Of Folkestone they report: "The house of Folkston is a littill house, well repayred, and the prior a veray honest parson and a veray good husbond, and no les belovyed emonges his neypours."³

These more or less impartial reports do not square with Layton's vituperations, but it was with the latter that the King armed himself when he went to the parliament of 1536

¹ Gasquet, 126.

² Brit. Mus. Cott. MS. Cleopatra E. iv, f. 219.

³ Cotton MS. *ut supra*.

and demanded the dissolution of all monasteries of less annual value than £200. Probably the bill would never have passed, for it met with determined opposition, had not the King sent for members of the House of Commons and threatened them with execution if they refused to conform to his will.¹ As it was, the preamble of the Act states expressly that it is upon the King's word as to the immoral conditions obtaining in such houses as are to be dissolved that the measure is to pass. A clause in the Act legalized any suppressions or surrenders which might have taken place at an earlier date, and the dissolution of the three East Kent monasteries, and of Bilsington Priory, which had come into the King's hands on February 28th, 1536, was thus given the sanction of law.

At the time when these matters were going forward Henry VIII and Cromwell were busily engaged in trying to rouse public opinion against the monks, and every effort was made to influence the people, by means of preachers selected for their known adherence to the official policy, and by stage plays and "interludes", often acted even in the churches, representing the "immoralities and disorders of the clergy". In June, 1535, Chapuys described to the Emperor the interest the King took in these plays. Henry, he says, had gone thirty miles, walking ten of the distance, at 2 o'clock in the morning, in order to be present at a representation of a chapter of the Apocalypse. He had taken up his position in a house from which he could observe everything, "but was so pleased to see himself represented as cutting off the heads of the clergy, that in order to laugh at his ease, and encourage the people, he discovered himself."²

The suppression of the lesser monasteries was pushed on actively, and at the same time efforts were made to get the larger houses, whose incomes exempted them under the Act, to surrender their property to the King. At Boxley Abbey, the only Cistercian monastery in Kent, whose revenues amounted to £208 a year, the Abbot John Dobbes was closely interrogated by the royal commissioners, but they could find

¹ Spelman, *Hist. of Sacrilege* (edn. 1853), 206.

² Gasquet, 108, quoting *Calendar*, viii, 949.

no complaint against him except that he grew too many gillyflowers (from which a liqueur was made) in the Abbey precincts. At Faversham the aged Abbot, John Sheppey, was badgered to resign by Cromwell, but wrote a polite and dignified refusal, stating that in spite of his age he considered himself well capable of carrying on his duties. "The cheyf office and profession of an abbot", he wrote, "[is], (as I have ever taken it) to lyve chaste and solytarilye, to be separate from the intromeddlynge of worldleye thinge, to serve God quietlye, and to distribute his faculties in the refreshing of poore indigent persons, to have vigilant eigh to good ordre, the rule of his house, and the flock to him commytted in God."¹ Who could have desired a more noble apologia? For two more years only was this Abbot left in peace. On July 8th, 1538, he was forced to surrender his house. Abbot Dobbes at Boxley had already given up the unequal struggle on January 29th of the same year.

Thus were the monasteries of Kent one after the other forced to surrender to their rapacious sovereign. St. Radegund's by Dover fell under the Act of 1536, and enables us, by this event, to date the journey of John Leland through this part of Kent. He notes that Langdon is "late suppressed", but that the white canons are still at St. Radegund's, where "the quire of the church is large and fair" and the house "neatly maintained", though the buildings had in former times been more extensive.² Leland's journey in this district, therefore, almost certainly took place in the spring of 1536.

By 1539 only the largest and most influential monasteries were left in Kent, but it was obvious that these were doomed to follow their lesser brethren. Already in 1538 the shrine of St. Thomas of Canterbury had been broken up and pillaged, and St. Thomas declared a traitor. "There is a common speaking here about us," wrote Prior Goldwell of Christchurch to Cromwell in much agony of mind, "that religious men shall leave or forsake their habits

¹ Fosbrooke, *British Monachism*, 1802, i, 125.

² Leland, *Itin.*, vii, 127.

and go as secular priests do. Whether they mind of some religious or of all I know not, . . . and as for my part I will never desire to forsake my habit as long as I live, for divers considerations that move me to the same. One is because religious men have been and continued in this our church these 900 years and more also. . . . For this and other considerations which your lordship knoweth better than I, I beseech your lordship to continue good lord to us, me and my brethren, that we may keep our habits of religion still. . . . It hath also been shown unto me that my Lord of Canterbury at his coming to the said church will take from me the keys of my chamber, and if he do, I doubt whether I shall have the same keys or chamber again or not. I have or can have none other comfort or help in this matter but only by your lordship. And where it pleased your good mind towards me to write unto me of late, by your letters, that I should have my said chamber with all commodities of the same as I have had in times past, the which your said writing to me was and is much to my comfort. And with the favour of your lordship I trust so to have for the term of my life, which term of my life by course of nature cannot be long, for I am above the age of 62 years."¹ Whether Thomas Goldwell retained his old room is not recorded. He was granted a prebendal stall when the new secular chapter was set up in the cathedral of which he had been Prior for twenty-two years.

With the accomplishment of the Dissolution came the dispersal of the religious and the break-up of the monastic estates. The suppressed monasteries were systematically plundered, the jewels and plate being usually sent to the central depôt of the Court of Augmentation in London, and the other effects sold piecemeal. Much property was sent overseas to be sold. "The Lord of Barrow", wrote an English priest from the Netherlands in 1540, "showed me that there were brought to his town of Antwerp so many rich and goodly copes out of England to sell these years past that it caused them all no less to marvel than in a manner to

¹ *Calendar*, xiii, pt. ii, No. 139.

mourn to see them come to a sale that were prepared to the service of God. Whereupon rose rumours that we had no masses in the realm [of England]."¹

Commissioners, usually county gentlemen, were appointed to make inventories of the goods of the monasteries before the pillage; and when, as was often the case, the persecution of Thomas Cromwell had made it necessary for valuables to be sold in order to carry on the life of a house, there was seldom wanting an informer to apprise the visitors of the fact. Sir Thomas Cheyne, Sir William Hawle, and Anthony St. Leger found one at Minster Priory in the Isle of Sheppey. "Sir Jhon Lorymer, paryshe priest," they wrote, "sayeth that upon Ascensyon day last past there was sett upon the Hygh Alter of the sayde Monasterye vij chaleses, whereof ys lacking iij at the day of takyng of the Inventorye; also he sayeth that upon Relyke Sanday there were worren vij copes, whereof one of blewe velvet borderyd with sterrys of gold, whyche is lackyng, and not mencyoned before. Item, he sayeth that the same day was borne the hede of Mary Magdalen, sylver and gylt, whiche ys lackyng, and not herto before mencyoned."²

The buildings themselves were often pulled down and the materials sold. At Dover Priory one "Adrian the brewer" bought the tiles and timber for £7, while Thomas Portway secured the "roof of the Lady chapel" for 13s. 4d. and the "grave stones and altar stones" for 12s. The commissioner superintending this transaction also admits that he has himself appropriated twenty tons of "rotten timber."³ At St. Augustine's, Canterbury, where, it is said, artillery had to be used to force Abbot Foche into surrender in 1538, some of the buildings were remodelled with brickwork as a palace for Henry VIII, while the remainder became a common stone quarry for the neighbourhood. In 1542-3 Burgate was extensively repaired, and for this purpose nine loads of stone were taken from the Abbey.

¹ R.O. State Papers, Dom., 1540, $\frac{W}{205}$.

² *Arch. Cant.*, vii, 305-6.

³ R.O. Exch. Aug. Off. Misc. Bk. 109, Nos, 22, 26.

Nothing was paid for it, but a man received 13½d. for carriage, and two others were paid for the work of demolition, which lasted four days.¹

As for the ejected monks and nuns, many of whom were not even pensioned, their fate is too sad to dwell upon; and the years have mercifully hidden from us many details which must have been heartrending. Apart from this aspect of the Dissolution, the matter which perhaps gives most cause for regret is the destruction and loss of manuscripts from Kentish houses. Dr. M. R. James has printed the catalogues and identified the extant remains of the libraries of Christchurch and St. Augustine's at Canterbury and of Dover Priory,² and has shown how few, comparatively speaking, are the relics now left to us of these great and valuable accumulations of books. John Leland secured a large number of manuscripts from the Cathedral Priory of Rochester, and these are now in the Royal collection in the British Museum, but of the libraries of the smaller monasteries of this county, apart from a few cartularies and similar books, the extant remains are insignificant. About a dozen MSS. from Lesnes Abbey, divided between the Victoria and Albert Museum, the British Museum, Lambeth, and college libraries at Oxford and Cambridge, almost complete the list.

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE NOTES.

Calendar: Brewer and Gairdner, *Calendar of Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII.*

Gasquet: F. A. Cardinal Gasquet, *Henry VIII and the English Monasteries.* (George Bell & Sons' edn., 1925.)

Wood: M. A. E. Wood, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain*, 3 vols., 1846.

¹ Hist. MSS. Comm., 9th Report, Append., p. 153.

² *The Ancient Libraries of Canterbury and Dover*, 1903.