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1914.

PART II.—PAPERS, ETC.

**Correspondence of
Bishop Oliver King and Sir Reginald Bray.**

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IT is my good fortune to be able to communicate to our Society four letters written to Sir Reginald Bray in the years 1501-2. I came across them shortly before I left Westminster in 1911 among the inexhaustible treasures of the Abbey Muniment Room. Besides the copies that I made I have also photographs of them taken by my kind friend Sir Benjamin Stone. Three of these letters are from Bishop Oliver King, two of them being full autographs, whilst the third which is of a more formal character is written in an excellent scribe's hand and bears the bishop's signature. The fourth letter throws some light on a person mentioned in two of the other letters, and has some historical interest of its own.

The first two letters shew the interest that was taken in the rebuilding of Bath Abbey Church by Sir Reginald Bray. This remarkable man, who was steward of the Lady Margaret's household and trustee of her Somerset properties, had been largely concerned in arranging the marriage between her son Henry Earl of Richmond and the Princess Elizabeth, thus uniting the houses of Lancaster and York and securing the crown for Henry VII. The new king made him a Knight of the Garter, and he soon became the most influential layman in England. He is often credited with architectural skill, but this is due to a misunderstanding. He controlled the royal building operations, as he controlled much besides; and his good taste may have shewn itself in his judgment of the king's masons and their plans: but he was a statesman, not an architect. He helped to lay the foundation stone of Henry VII's Chapel at Westminster in January 1503, a short time before his death; and he was also concerned with the work at St. George's, Windsor, where both he and Bishop Oliver King lie buried. So far as King Henry VII was interested in the work at Bath Abbey, that interest was represented by Sir Reginald Bray.

Whether the parsimonious monarch relaxed his purse-strings or not, we know from these letters that he sent his royal masons to design and supervise the building of the new church. In Professor Lethaby's valuable book, "Westminster Abbey and the King's Masons," the most prominent names among the master masons of this period are those of Robert and William Vertue. Robert Vertue occurs in various documents from 1501 to 1509; William Vertue from 1505 to 1526: so that probably Robert was the father or the elder brother of William. Robert was responsible for building at the Tower of London and at the King's Palace of Pleasaunce at Greenwich, and he is mentioned as first among the king's master masons in connection with the cost of the tomb to be erected in Henry the Seventh's Chapel. Professor Lethaby has no doubt that he was the architect of the chapel itself.

William Vertue was the second of two masons who in 1505 made a contract for vaulting the choir of St. George's Chapel at Windsor, the work to be completed at Christmas 1508 at a cost of £700. In 1510 he was made master mason at the Tower, so that presumably Robert Vertue was then dead. After this we find him at Eton, at King's College, Cambridge (though the vault there was not built by him), and at Corpus Christi College in Oxford: other works at Oxford were probably designed by him.

These letters inform us that, besides sending the king's masons to design the vault, Sir Reginald Bray was arranging to found a chantry in the church, as the bishop was also doing on his own behalf. The "boke" or deed of their chantries was being drawn up by the lawyer Master Cunesby. This was Coningsby, who was made king's serjeant in 1500, and a puisne judge in 1509, when he was knighted as Sir Humphrey Coningsby.

Further we learn that Master John Dawtrey of Hampton, *i.e.* Southampton, was negotiating for the purchase of plain and coloured glass from Normandy for the windows of the church.

The bishop, writing in January, is confident that before winter sets in the roofing of the choir will be completed.

The rebuilding of the Abbey Church is said to have been the result of a dream which Bishop Oliver King had in 1499. Both he and Sir Reginald Bray died in the month of August 1503. The latest date for these letters, therefore, is January 1503: and even this gives little enough time for the building to have advanced so near to its completion. If we accept this date, it follows that the choir was not finished when the bishop died, and we have a sufficient explanation of the fact that, though he directed in his will that he should be buried on the north side of the choir at Bath, both he and Sir Reginald Bray were buried in St. George's, Windsor, where also both of them had founded chantries.

1. [*Westminster Abbey Muniments, 16,040*].

After due Recommendation. Robert and William Vertu have been here with me that can make unto you Rapport of the state and forwardenes of this oure chirche of bathe. And also of the vawte devised for the chancelle of the said chirche. Wherunto as they say nowe ther shal be noone so goodely neither in england nor in france. And therof they make theym fast and sure.

They have with theym a Writing of Recesses upon the communication between theym and me had in al thinges for to shewe the same unto you. Wherfor I am the shorter in that behalf.

I beseche you to Remembre Cunesby oon of the kinges sargentess at the lawe for the writing the priour here shuld make unto us two for our chanteryes and other suffrages to be had in this monastery for evir.

Item that I may have knowlege from my feluwe Dawtre of hampton what bargeyne he hath made for the hundred cases of glasses to be had out of Normandy, with the price of every C. cases bothe of coloured glassys and others.

This chirche as farre as I can see shalbe thoroughtely covered far beforne alhalowe tide next commyng with the leve of our lord who send unto you thaccomplishment of your goodely desirs. At my Monastery of Bathe forsaid the xvij day of Janyver, with the scribbling hand of hym that ys

all your owne Oliver Bathe

Endorsed : To Mai[ster] Ser Reynald Bray.

2. [*Westminster Abbey Muniments, 16,046*].

Sir I beseche you to be good loving fader in myn absence to my Niepce Dame Elisabeth Philpot in al her causes. And that ye geve no licence to eny free mason to absent hym from this buylding. Divers masons ther be that wol not comme til after Candelmas trustyng that in the meane saison they wol cause you to be entreted to write unto me for to suffre theym to work in other mennys businesses. One ther ys called thomas lynn oone the most necessary mason for me that I can have and oone of [of] theym that ys appointed by Robert Vertu.

It shal please you to Remembre Mr Dautre for the Normandy glasse and Mr Cunesby for our boke for our chanteryes and other suffrages. And thus I Recommande me unto you with al myn hert.

At my Monastery of bathe the xxv day of January where is myn hab (8 letters lost) harme I perceive it wel

all your Oliver Bathe.

Endorsed : To Maister Ser Reynald Bray.

The third letter is of a more formal character, and was probably intended to be shewn to the king. The precentorship of Wells had fallen vacant owing to the promotion of the precentor to the bishopric of London, from which he presently passed on to the archbishopric of Canterbury. William Warham was a great scholar and a friend of Erasmus, but at Wells we know him as the first precentor who neglected his duty of continuous residence: his house was dilapidated, and the services of the Cathedral Church were slovenly through his neglect. He had succeeded Thomas Overay, an active man who has left his mark on the church of Pilton which belonged to the precentorship: and he was followed by Thomas Cornish, the suffragan bishop, who was a resident canon and lies buried in the Cathedral.

It would appear that Bishop Oliver King on his translation from Exeter to Wells in 1495 had promised the king to accept his nominations to the chief appointments in the diocese; and in this letter he shews in detail that he had not forgotten his obligation. But he was determined that he would not have on his conscience another absentee precentor. Accordingly he wrote as follows to Sir Reginald Bray:

3. [*Westminster Abbey Muniments*, 16,044].

After due Recommendation. Soo it ys I cam hider as on thursday last. And amonges other thinges I have loked upon the qwere and upon the dyvyne services doon daily in this my Chirche of Wellys and finde therein many enormyties by the absence of the chanter, for it ys that dignite that al the good ordre of dyvyne service dependeth upon.

I have enquired also of the condition of that dignite. And finde that except maister Warham ther hath not been as eny man here can Remembre eny chanter but that he hath kept personel Residence. The Revenewe therof excedeth not yerely the value of xxxvj li. When it ys best Repayred. And yit xij li therof standeth in candel Rent that ys for nowe almoost in an extreme decay. And the place of his inhabitation ys fowle to loke to and overgrowen almoost like a wilderness.

And where as ye say that I forgete my promes to the

king. Nay Nay I thinke wel upon it and have the said dignite in myn handes ungeven.

Trouth it ys that I nevir said nay unto the kinges grace neither in the archedeconery of Wellys that ys wel worth viij^{ss} li. and more nor yit in the archedeconery of Tanton worth iij^{ss}xij li. Nor in the prebend of Yatton worth an C. markes that M^r baptist brother hath nor in the benefice Aisbury worth fiftj markes and a vicary endueth that M^r Urswik hath. And for the denery I compowned with his grace as ye knowe wel. But and I had geven them of my self. suche personaiges shuld have had them as I am sure shuld have kept daily Residence. Wherby God shuld have been far the better served and my chirche sett in farre gretter honour by the same.

The king was oonys agreed that ye shuld make an eend between his grace and me. What his plaiser ys nowe I can not say.

Certain it ys. that the dignite of the chanter above and amonges al the dignitees of my chirche ys moost behooful and moost bonden to be contynuely Resident for the wele and ordering of divine service. Raison dryveth it.

And because I wol not accombre you with eny lenguer writing. It shal please the king sithens this benefice exceedeth not. xxxvj li. and farre in decay and Requireth personel Residence by grete and solempne othe as it ys above said. to suffre me to be at my libertie in the disposition therof for thassured contynuance of divine services and to have of me xl li. for the same my libertie. Orelles his grace to take the charge of divine services upon his conscience. And to name eny habil personne therto. and I shal make out my sufficient collacion upon the same for his plaiser. Soo as god willing my conscience shalbe sauf in every behalf. And what his grace wol doo in the premisses. It may like you to certifie me by writing ffor this matier toucheth moost the wele of my chirche of eny thing sithens it was myne. In the surplis it shal please you to geve credence to Thomas Grene. At my palais of Wellys. the xj day of June.

Oliver Bathe

Endorsed : To maister [Rey]nald Bray.

As Warham was elected Bishop of London in Oct. 1501, and the precentorship was held by Bishop Thomas Cornish on 4 Sept. 1502, this letter must be dated 11 June 1502.

We have now to note the various appointments which were

made in connection with what the bishop speaks of as his "promise unto the king."

(1). The archdeaconry of Wells. The reference here is to "Francis archbishop of Byzantium and prince of the empire," who according to the Chapter records was installed in the archdeaconry on 30 Dec. 1500. The archdeaconry fell vacant soon after this letter was written: for on 19 Nov. 1502 Thomas Beamont, the archdeacon of Bath, was installed as archdeacon of Wells: his successor at Wells was the famous Polydore Vergil.

(2). The archdeaconry of Taunton. On 16 Dec. 1496 Robert Shirborne was installed.

(3). The prebend of Yatton, "that Mr. baptist brother hath," is somewhat puzzling. All I have found is that on 28 Nov. 1499 Sir Jheronimus Boerius of Thabia Januensis, LL.D., was installed; and that on his death Bernard Boerius clerk succeeded to his prebend 31 July 1506.

The vicarage of Yatton was held by a much more famous person, Master Christopher Urswick, who on 6 Oct. 1502 (*i.e.* four months after this letter), was installed to the prebend of Eston in Gordano. Chr. Urswick had been chaplain to the Lady Margaret and held even a more prominent position than Reginald Bray in the arrangements which placed Henry VII on the throne. At this time he was dean of Windsor and registrar of the Order of the Garter, having succeeded Bishop Oliver King in that office.

(4). Lastly, the deanery, of which the bishop says, "I compowned with his grace as ye knowe wel." The deanery was not in the bishop's gift, nor (as it is now) in the king's. Yet if both king and bishop were insistent, the chapter's right of free election from among their own body would not easily be asserted. The great Dean Gunthorpe had died in June 1498, having left his house a marvel of beauty, such that in later days it was coveted and claimed on two occasions by the greatest men in the kingdom—Thomas Lord Cromwell and

the Protector Somerset. A few days after his death a message came from the king to the chapter, requesting them to place the election in his hands, and saying that he would nominate one who was a canon and a doctor. Mr. Richard Hatton who brought the message was both! The chapter replied cautiously, saying that the canons who were entitled to elect were scattered over the kingdom, and that no election could take place till they had the bishop's licence to proceed. The next fact bearing on the matter is that on 28 Oct. William Cousyn, *in jure licenciatus*, (*i.e.* not yet a doctor), the archdeacon of Bath, was installed as a canon. On 25 Dec. he was elected dean: he was installed by proxy 23 June 1499, and again in person 8 June 1502, when he is described as *decretorum doctor*.

Why should the bishop have compounded with the king to secure this election? It can hardly be that he was specially concerned to protect the chapter's right of free election. A little family history may throw some light on the matter. The chapter records shew that on 12 Oct. 1502 a confirmation was sealed of the bishop's grant of the manor of Compton Bishop to his sister Elizabeth Cousyn and Robert Cosyn her son. This grant was cancelled soon afterward and the manor of Blackford was given instead. It certainly looks as if the bishop's sister had married the future dean's brother. We may go a step further in conjecture: for we remember that the bishop had a niece named Dame Elizabeth Philpot. If she was the daughter of Elizabeth Cousyn she was the niece both of the bishop and of the dean. Who her husband was we do not know; but it is a fair guess that he was no distant relation to Robert Philpot who on 20 Oct. 1505 was installed in the prebend of Whitelakynton.

As we are on the subject of family influence, we may note here that Sir Reginald Bray, the friend and correspondent of Bishop Oliver King, was appointed on 13 Sept. 1501 steward of all the hundreds and lordships of the dean and chapter;

and that Edward Bray was prebendary of Litton in 1500, and was succeeded by John Bray in 1503. These things shock us now : but they only began to shock the general conscience in England about 50 years ago.

We may mention, in conclusion, that Thomas Grene who was the bearer of this letter was in Sept. 1499 appointed keeper of the bishop's park and manor of Banwell and bailiff of the hundred of Wynterstoke.

The fourth letter is written to Sir Reginald Bray by John Dawtre, who in one of the other letters the bishop spoke of as "my feluwe Dawtre of hampton." It would seem that the town of Southampton had got into trouble with the king and had been heavily fined. Dawtre intercedes on their behalf.

More interesting is the story he tells of some of the confederates of Edmund de la Pole. This young nobleman was son of the second Duke of Suffolk and of Elizabeth sister of King Edward IV. He was employed on some occasions by Henry VII, whose ward he had been ; but in the summer of 1499 he fled the country. He was persuaded to return, but in August 1501 he went to the court of the Emperor Maximilian, hoping with his support to gain the English crown. On 7 Sept. he was publicly "accursed" as a traitor at Paul's Cross. His plans came to nothing, and in January 1506 he was surrendered by Philip King of Castile and was committed to the Tower : in 1513 he was beheaded by King Henry VIII.

John Dawtre's letter was written in October 1501 or 1502. It tells of a plot at Beaulieu Abbey, in which the abbot's porter and certain refugees who had taken sanctuary there were involved ; the party was captured when they were on the point of sailing to join Edmund de la Pole.

4. [*Westminster Abbey Muniments*, 16,030].

After alle dew recummendacyon, please it your master-shippe to have knowlege, "The meyer of Hampton hathe word owt of the Exchequer that master undertresorer wylle sette so grete amercementes uppon the towne that they

shalle not be abyllle to bere hit ; as v ii the fyrst day, and every day gretter and gretter : and if he so doe the towne wille be clerely done. The meyer this yere hathe endeveryd hymselfe very welle to gader money, and dayly doythe : so that I shalle brynge uppe at alle halowtyde for the kyng ccl. ii or more ; beside the quene and alle other payementes : the uttermost peny that can be made shalle surely be broughte uppe then. Wherfor the meyer and his bretheryn beseche your good mastershippe to be so good master un to them, that the proces may be stoppyd tylle that tyme. I thynke your mastershippe hathe herd of the treson begon at beaule, whiche was thus. Skelton, Badcocke the cornysse man that Ran away with the shippe of tyn owt of the west countrey, Baskervyle the abbot is porter, with diverse other seyntuary men, to the number of x personys yntendyd to have stolyn a shippe and to have gone to Edmund de la Pole. They wer evyn at the poynt of ther goyng : how be it, hit ys discoveryd and they alle taken except one of the sympelyst of them. Yesterday I was at beaule, and baskervyle confessyd every word playnely, and coursyd moche Skelton and Badcocke. Diverse of the remenaunt have confessyd hit also, as knowethe almighty god, who ever preserve your good mastershippe. Wrete at hampton the xvth day of October

By your servaunt

John Dawtrey.

Endorsed : To the righte worshipfulle and my syngeler good master Ser Reynold Bray knyght for the kynges body be this delyveryd.