

The Prebend of Yatton.

BY THE VERY REV. J. ARMITAGE ROBINSON, D.D., F.S.A.,
Dean of Wells.

THE prebend of Yatton was the battle-ground of a series of conflicts in the early part of the fourteenth century. The struggles for its possession illustrate the uncertainty of patronage at this period, when the bishop's rights were invaded in turn by pope and king.

Early in 1322 the Yatton stall fell vacant by the death of Master Richard de Abindon, and on 21 March Bishop John de Drokensford instituted to it his nephew Andrew, son of Philip de Drokensford, who was then only an acolyte: a mandate for his installation was issued on the following day to the dean, John de Godelee (*Drok. Reg.* 186*a*). On 14 April Andrew de Drokensford was present at a meeting of the chapter (R. i 158); but on 7 August the bishop writes to the dean and chapter to say that, as his kinsman Andrew is studying at the university, he has appointed three canons to pay certain dues to the chapter arising out of the vacancy of the prebend (*Drok.* 23*b*). On 1 Sept. in the next year, 1323, Andrew de Drokensford, prebendary of Yatton, appears in chapter and acknowledges himself bound to the dean in a sum of more than £45, levied of goods of the late prebendary (R. i 168).

This is the last we hear of Andrew. When and how the prebend became vacant we do not know: but it was given to Richard de Thistelden, son of Henry de Thistelden knight, who on 13 January 1324 had obtained a papal provision of a canonry at Wells with reservation of a vacant prebend (*Cal. of Papal Letters*, II, 236). The new prebendary however had

but a brief tenure. On 11 Sept. 1324 the king issued a writ requiring the installation of Robert de Baldock, archdeacon of Middlesex, whom he presented on the ground of a vacancy of the bishopric under his father, K. Edward I (*Drok.* 227*a*). The bishop must have contested this claim; for on 2 May 1325 the king declares that he has recovered the presentation in his court against the bishop (*ibid.*). Accordingly on 9 May we read that Master Richard de Thistelden precentor resigns the stall, and on 13 May the bishop orders Robert de Baldock to be installed. His proxy for the installation is stated to have been Robert de Baldock *junior* (*Drok.* 239*a, b*).

The new prebendary of Yatton was the chancellor of England, and the precentor was no doubt wise in stepping out of his way. St Paul's, Lichfield and Lincoln already had him as a prebendary; nor was he quite a stranger to Wells. On 28 Oct. 1320 the bishop had undertaken to pay Master Robert de Baldock, canon of St Paul's, London, and king's clerk, £10 a year till he should be beneficed in the cathedral church (*Drok.* 164*a*). Moreover on 2 June 1324 the dean and chapter tried to make some use of him; for they wrote to 'their brother the archdeacon of Middlesex and king's chancellor' to influence the king to write to the pope about the canonisation of their former bishop, William de Marchia (R. i. 172).

At this point we may make a brief digression, and recount a page in the story of Robert de Baldock *junior*, of whom mention has been made above, and who no doubt was a kinsman as well as the namesake of the chancellor. The whole story occupies a page in the register of Bishop Drokensford (f. 198*b*). We may premise that on 3 May 1311 John de Winchelsey, a youthful kinsman of the great archbishop of that day, was instituted to the prebend of Barton (*Drok.* 35*a*). It was the custom, even to comparatively recent times, for a newly consecrated bishop to place at the disposal of the archbishop one or two of the vacant benefices in his diocese, and this may perhaps be the reason why in the second year of Bishop Drokensford's episcopate a nephew of Archbishop Winchelsey was appointed prebendary of Barton. Be that as it may, John de Winchelsey held his prebend in peace for nearly twelve

years. The old archbishop had died, and his place was taken by Archbishop Reynolds, the most contemptible figure that ever sat in the primate's seat. Reynolds and Baldock were among the most powerful statesmen of this disastrous reign.

The first entry on our page is the proxy; given at Sonning, on 24 March 1323, by John de Winchelsey, to Master Robert de Crishale to resign on his behalf the prebend of Barton: it is attested by Bishop Roger of Salisbury and sealed with his seal. Then follows the form of resignation as made by the proctor on 31 March in the *camera* of Bishop Drokensford at Wiveliscombe; and we are told that this was done in the presence among others of Andrew de Drokensford, canon of Wells, who as we remember was the recently appointed prebendary of Yatton. No hint has been given us thus far of the reason for this resignation. But a note in the margin says that this resignation was written out by the hand of the proctor, and then sealed with the seal of Robert de Baldock *junior*, canon of Wells, at the proctor's request. Moreover Robert de Baldock and the proctor solemnly promised the bishop that he should shortly have a 'similar and more competent resignation' under authentic seal, and that they would preserve the bishop harmless in the matter. On the same day, says our next document, at Wiveliscombe the bishop conferred the prebend of Barton on Master Robert de Baldock *junior*, doctor of civil law (*juris civilis professor*). Next comes the mandate to the dean or his *locum tenens* for the induction; and a marginal note adds that there was a similar mandate to the archdeacon of Wells or his official. Last of all comes a memorandum which shews the kind of pressure by which the resignation and the new appointment had been secured. Letters supplicatory, we are told, had been sent to the bishop by the king, the queen and the archbishop, which letters remained in the bishop's keeping.

From this miserable interlude we return to our main story. Not even the king's chancellor could hold Yatton for long. The last years of K. Edward II, in which the two Despensers and Baldock held the reins of government, were as disgraceful and troubled as any in English history. We may assume that Bishop Drokensford was not Baldock's friend when the crisis

came and sides had to be chosen : for on 19 Oct. 1326 his register informs us that he has instituted to the prebend of Yatton, as being then vacant, his nephew Master Richard de Drokensford (*Drok.* 243*b*) ; and on 14 Nov. Master Robert de Wamberg makes declaration by a notary public that, having endeavoured in vain to cite Robert de Baldock on the bishop's behalf, he had laid the citation in writing on St Mary's altar at Yatton (*Drok.* 243*a*). These acts are sufficiently explained by the collapse of the king and his ministers. On 24 Sept. 1326 Q. Isabella had landed from France to avenge her wrongs, and on 15 Oct. Bishop Stapledon of Exeter, the treasurer, had been murdered by the mob in Cheapside. Baldock had fled with the king, and was captured with him at Neath Abbey on 16 Nov. : he came to a violent end in London on 24 May 1327. In the communar's roll for the year ending Mich. 1328 there is an entry of 25*s.* 1*d.* for the *obit* of Master Robert Baldock : but the entry is cancelled, the money it would seem not having been paid.

The collation of Richard de Drokensford on 19 Oct. 1326 is not followed by the usual mandate to the dean to induct ; and to make his position secure he was instituted afresh to the Yatton prebend on 30 May 1327, six days after Baldock's death : the mandate for induction then issued states that the bishop had letters patent and close in the matter. Bishop Drokensford after the manner of his time was somewhat too prone to recognise exceptional merit in the members of his own family : *uno avulso non deficit alter Aureus* ; and so Richard steps into the place of Andrew. On this occasion at any rate Yatton was the gainer by his nepotism. For on 14 June he arranged for the augmentation of the stipend of the vicar of the parish. Hitherto, while the prebendary as rector received 100 marks, the vicar had but 12 marks with two chaplains to keep (*Drok.* 265*b*). Meanwhile the nephew got abundant compensation : on 10 June, though still but an acolyte, he was made precentor of the cathedral church, and three days later a mandate for his induction was issued to the bishop's official and the chancellor (*Drok.* 265*b*).

But it was now the pope's turn to interfere ; and unfortunately he did so in a way that produced two papal candidates

at the same time. The story is not easy to follow: some links in the chain appear to be missing. We will begin with the more conspicuous of the two claimants for the Yatton prebend. Alan de Conesburgh had on 31 Jan. 1325 been made proctor for the dean and chapter to obtain certain papal letters (R. i 170). A year later, 9 Jan. 1326, he was appointed proctor at the papal court for Bishop Drokensford (*Drok.* 251*b*). He had yet other business on hand at Avignon: for on 22 April, as proctor of William archbishop of York, he brought back a new pall to take the place of that which had been stolen from the archbishop's chapel in London (*Cal. of Pap. Let.*, II, 250). Somewhere about this time we find the dean and chapter writing to thank Alan de Conesburgh for past services, and to ask his aid against some designs of Glastonbury Abbey: they say that they have delayed writing to the pope on his behalf, as they hope that a prebend will be given him by the bishop (R. i. 267*b*). There is also—but again without date—a copy of a petition from the dean and chapter asking Pope John XXII to provide Alan de Conesburgh with a canonry and prebend at Wells (*ibid.*).

Now in the Calendar of Papal Letters we find in volume II, p. 267, an entry, which appears to belong to the year 1327, to the effect that Alan de Conesburgh obtained on 22 November provision of the prebend of Yatton, void by the death of Robert de Baldock; and on the same page we read that on 23 Jan. 1328 he received reservation of a dignity or office at Wells notwithstanding that he had the above provision.¹ What makes these entries puzzling is that on 14 July 1327, soon after the news of Baldock's death had reached Avignon, provision of the prebend of Yatton, 'void by the death of Robert de Baldock' had already been made to Thomas de Trillek, a nephew of Adam de Orleton, now bishop of Worcester and the most powerful man in the kingdom (*Pap. Let.*, II, 263).

No explanation of this confusion is forthcoming. But it is plain that there were two candidates for Yatton, to say nothing

1. Notwithstanding also that he is rector of Hickleton in the diocese of York and has a prebend of St Mary's, Stafford: Hickleton however he is to resign.

of Bishop Drokensford's nephew who for greater security had been twice over inducted into the prebend. Thomas de Trillek, the bishop of Worcester's nephew, had strong force behind him in England; but his rival knew his way better about the papal court: indeed he was on the spot early in 1328; for on 4 Feb. we learn that he has brought a contribution of 1000 florins from the archbishop of York (*ibid.*, p. 487). He seems to have discovered that there was a technical flaw in his earlier provision, which indeed was also in that of Thomas de Trillek: it had to do with the method by which the prebend had become void. Accordingly on 1 May he got the matter put straight: for under that date we read that he obtained a provision of the prebend of Yatton, as void by the death of Robert de Baldock, provision having already been made to him of the same; but, as it appears that Robert was deprived of Yatton before his death, provision is now made anew (*ibid.*, p. 272). So far therefore as the pope was concerned Alan de Conesburgh had got in, and a papal letter of 11 Dec. 1328 speaks of him as prebendary of Yatton.

But when we look at Bishop Drokensford's register we find an unexpected entry in regard to Yatton. His own nephew indeed has disappeared from the scene, but the bishop of Worcester's nephew is to the fore. On 20 April 1329 the bishop informs the dean and chapter that, since Thomas de Trillek has provision of Yatton, he must not be hindered from obtaining possession. A memorandum is attached in the register to this curiously worded mandate, to the effect that the bishop of Winchester (John de Stratford) had written that he and the bishop of Worcester (Adam de Orleton) were determined to proceed against Master Alan de Conesburgh, and that whatever the issue might be Bishop Drokensford should be held unharmed; wherefore the bishop of Winchester begged him to see that his brother of Worcester's nephew got possession unhindered (*Drok.* 306a).

An echo of the conflict is heard in a later papal rescript (*Pap. Let.*, II, 306), which shews yet further that arrangements satisfactorily made at Avignon could not always get carried out in England. On 25 Feb. 1330 Alan de Conesburgh receives, at the request of his old patron the archbishop of York,

provision of a canonry at York with reservation of a prebend ; notwithstanding that he is rector of a moiety of Rotherham, and has a canonry of Wells and the prebend of Yatton—of none of which he is able to get possession—and is rector of Hickleton and has prebends of Ripon and of St Mary's, Stafford, there being an appeal to the pope lodged against him touching the prebend of Ripon.

Alan de Conesburgh appears presently in a struggle for the provostship at Wells : in this he was more successful. But he had lost Yatton. Thomas de Trillek was still holding it on 25 Jan. 1341, when he complains that he cannot get justice as against Richard de Trillek his perpetual vicar there (*Bp. Ralph's Reg.*, S.R.S., vol. x, p. 442). Alack, poor Yatton !