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PAPERS, ETC.

Bishop Bekynton.

BY THE REV. G. WILLIAMS, B.D., SENIOR FELLOW OF
KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

IT is not without very serious misgivings that I have undertaken to read a paper before this Association on one of the most distinguished Prelates who has occupied the See of Bath and Wells, to whom this his cathedral city is indebted for some of the fine monuments of mediæval architecture which still adorn it, and whose memory is still revered as the liberal and enlightened benefactor of the town. I have had the opportunity of learning how deeply his name is engraved in the heart of one of your townsmen, and how fondly the recollection of his good deeds is cherished; as I have been permitted to examine the manuscript collections made by Mr. Serel, with whom it

VOL. XII., 1863, PART II. A

has been a labour of love for many years past to gather together from all quarters whatever he could find bearing upon the private or official life of Bishop Bekynton. It is only because I believe that I have had the advantage of opening and exploring a new mine of matter concerning him, hitherto accessible to very few, that I presume, stranger as I am among you, to come to speak to Somersetshire men of a Somersetshire worthy, here in his own episcopal city, under the shadow of his own cathedral, in which, we trust, after his long and busy life of honest devotion to his King and his Church, "he sleeps well," though no longer, I am grieved to find, under that gorgeous canopy which the care of his executors erected over his recumbent effigy on the south side of the presbytery, but which modern *restoration*, as it is called, has dissevered from it and stuck up in an utterly meaningless position and *à propos* of nothing against the east wall of the south transept. I hope, too, that I may be able to extract from those large materials at my command some notices which may serve as interesting illustrations of the manners of the times, in connection with the personal history of Thomas Bekynton.

Born at Bekynton, in this county, and early brought under the notice of William of Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester, the munificent founder of New College and Winchester, he so favourably impressed that worthy prelate that he directed John Morris, the first Warden of Winchester, to admit him as a scholar of that foundation. This was in 1403. There he remained three years, when he was transferred to New College, Oxford, where he soon realised the hopeful promise of his boyhood and attained great eminence in the University. He was collated to a prebend in York in

1423, was appointed Archdeacon of Bucks in 1424, Prebendary of Lichfield in 1436, of London in 1438. He was besides Rector of St. Leonard's-by-Hastings, Vicar of Sutton Courtney, Berks, Prebendary of Bedwin, Canon of Wells, Master of St. Katherine's Hospital, Dean of the Court of Arches, first Tutor and afterwards Secretary to King Henry VI., then Keeper of the Privy Seal, and finally, in 1443, promoted to the See of Bath and Wells, which he occupied until his death, on the 14th of January, 1465.

I must now proceed to fill up some parts of this outline. The materials to which I have alluded, and on which I shall draw almost exclusively for this paper, consist of a large collection of official and private letters written by Bekynton during the time that he was Private Secretary to King Henry VI., chiefly between the years 1438 and 1443, when he was promoted to the Bishopric of Bath and Wells. Of his official letters I shall say little, because, full of interest as they are for their bearing on the relations of the English Crown with the foreign sovereigns of Europe in the 15th century, and important in an historical view, they throw little light on the personal character of the subject of this biographical paper. I shall therefore draw chiefly on those which he wrote in his private capacity to his numerous friends, during the time that he was in close attendance upon his royal master, whose confidence he seems to have enjoyed in an eminent degree.

The first feature which it occurs to me to notice in this remarkable man is his extraordinary industry. He must have been one of the very busiest men of his time: and yet whatever he did was well and thoroughly done. The King's court and household seems to have shifted its

residence much more frequently in those days than it does in these ; although the means of locomotion were so very limited, even for royalty, compared with the facilities of modern travel : to say nothing of the state of the roads. So far as I can judge from the dates of these letters, King Henry VI. resembled the saints of old, as in other peculiarities so in this, that he "had no certain dwelling place." Windsor, Westminster, Eltham, Kennington, Shene or Richmond, and Reading Abbey, seem to have been equally and indifferently favoured by the royal presence, at no certain intervals and never for many weeks together. Bekynton must have been perpetually on the move, and instead of wondering at the indications of pressure occasionally, but rarely, exhibited by the word *raptim*, 'in haste,' at the close of his letters, the wonder is how he could find time for the due discharge of one tenth of his manifold duties. For he not only had to conduct the official correspondence with all the Courts of Europe, especially with the Court of Rome, during the time when the King's relations with Pope Eugenius IV. and many of the cardinals were of the most intimate and friendly kind; his presence was always in request for other services about the King's person. "I am appointed his reader," he writes in 1441, "nearly every day;" and from frequent allusions it is clear that he was often referred to as his confidential adviser in matters of deep interest to his royal patron, of whom, however, he always speaks to his most intimate friends, and in his most unguarded passages, in terms of deep reverence and affectionate respect; so that the adage concerning the natural tendency of familiarity was not verified in this instance. One approach, however, I have remarked to the formula "*ego et rex meus*" of another

mediæval statesman. In a letter to which I shall have occasion to refer more fully presently, addressed to a friend at Rome, he speaks of his intention of writing to the Pope with a present which he was preparing for him; "I purpose also," he adds, "that the King should write letters of acknowledgment for me and my friends to the same my most holy lord." But in order to appreciate his unwearied diligence, it must be remembered that Bekynton's duties at this time were not confined to the Court. He was during all this period Archdeacon of Bucks., Dean of the Arches Court, occasionally Prolocutor in Convocation, and Envoy on two or three long and important embassies to different parts of France—to Calais, Arras, and Armagnac.

It is clear that in order to get through such a mass of work he must have been what is called "a man of business habits," regular and methodical in his manner of transacting the complicated affairs of his various offices. And there is preserved in the Ashmolean collection of MSS. now in the Bodleian at Oxford, a curious record of his systematic method of conducting his correspondence as King's Secretary. This is a volume which contains, besides a large collection of State letters (which may have been preserved as models for others to be written under like circumstances), a kind of phrase dictionary and lists of words and sentences, together with longer formulæ, for all conceivable emergencies whether of official or personal and private correspondence, together with the proper designations and titles by which to address all possible princes, persons, states, and potentates, ecclesiastical and civil, within or without the realm. I will take the headings of some of these formulæ at random. Besides the *Colores Verborum* and the *Colores Sententiarum*, here we have the *Congé d'élire*, the "Royal assent," "Resti-

tution of Temporalities," "Licences" for all possible elections, "Missive Letters" on all possible occasions. Then there is the Certificate of the death of a Knight of the Garter, Summonses to Chapters of the Order, Narrations, Salutations, Warrants, Petitions to the same, according to their rank and dignity. How to address one's own bishop or abbat; how to address not one's own; how to address prelates in general; how to address a religious friend; how to address any friends whatever. The friends seem to demand more minute and particular attention, and the formulæ descend to details. Some are very curious. "A friend asks the sympathy of a friend." "A friend sympathizes with a friend, and promises succour, and exhorts him to be of good heart." "A friend seeks comfort of a friend." "A friend rejoices in the prosperous success of his friend." "A friend complains of a friend that he has forgotten friendship." "A friend blames his friend because he does not visit him." "A friend thanks his friend because he was willing to visit him." Curious specimens, it must be admitted, of the private correspondence of the 15th century, which must, one would imagine, needs have given a very uniform and official character to the private correspondence of the worthy Secretary, and have savoured strongly of the red tape and sealing-wax of the Circumlocution Office of those days; for I find abundant evidence in these letters that that venerable institution was not only in existence at that remote period, but was already fully developed; and that while its head-quarters were at Rome, its ramifications extended over the whole of Europe.

But fully occupied as Secretary Bekynton's time must have been at the best, there were methods long since discovered for lightening the duties of some of his offices;

and we shall presently find that he took care, like a prudent man, that his public duties should not interfere with his private interests; but be made rather to subserve them. In the Ashmolean volume is a royal letter to the Pope, praying that in consideration of his many arduous avocations he may be dispensed from holding annual visitations as Archdeacon of Bucks; and a brief correspondence with Bishop Grey, of Lincoln, indicates that the business of the Arches Court did not receive from the Judge that amount of supervision which would have been desirable, in order to obviate inconveniences occasioned by the conduct of its officials. The Bishop's letter is so curious as a specimen of the English of the day, and the tone of Bekynton's reply, which is in Latin, is so thoroughly characteristic of the man, that I am tempted to introduce them as an episode into my paper. The Bishop's letter is addressed to "that worshipful man master Thomas Bekynton, official of the Court of Canterbury and Archdeacon of Bucks, our brother :"—

Wele belufede brother,—I grete yowe wele, mervayling gretely that on Fryday now laste when ye had dyned wyth me, and I as ye saghe toke myne horse for to ryde, even in my goying owte at my gate, came one to me and inhibited me by your auctorytee and cited me to apere afore yowe wyth ynne the fourtened day next followyng; of the which inhibicyon I myght neythere hafe syght nor copy at my costes to such tyme as I sent fro Colbroke to London for a cople; by the which I conceyved wol hit was in the matier of the Chapel of Boveny, in the parish of Burnham; the which matier and all other, as wele spirituall as temporell, bytwix those partyes, as ye wele knowe, were putt in compromyse. And syth ye be the juge of the hyghest Court spirituall in this lande, and to whome all the prelates of this provynce must hafe recourse, me thynke ye shoud be ryght wele advised what passed under your seal, and in specyal agayns a prelate; and therefore if ye hafe done me laghe to cite me to so short a tyme, wele be hit. Never-

thelesse, I wyll not disobey in no kynde, but by the grace of God, to apere at my day and do all that lagh wyll. Wherefore blames me not if I another day do as litell favor to yowe in your jurisdiction, if hit lyg in my powere, as hit shall ryght wele, I truste in God, who keepe you ever.

Wryten in my monastery of Eynesham under my signet the xvi. day of Feveryer.

W. THE BISSHOP OF LINCOLN.

Now, as it must be acknowledged that, according to the Bishop's representation, this was sharp practice on the part of the Dean of the Court of Arches, it is only fair to hear Bekynton's defence. It runs as follows, and is conceived in sufficiently strong language, as his manner was:—

The very aspect of your letter, venerable father and lord, sufficiently declares the perturbation of your mind, indignant against your son, who is altogether innocent. I wish, indeed, that reason had so tempered, discretion so bridled your indignation that you had not condemned before you heard, nor judged before you had cognizance of the matter. I call God to witness, and if I lie may I be struck with lightning and perish, that many times before, often, yea always, I have taken the utmost pains and diligence to oblige both you and yours. And now I see that one light, and evil, and groundless suspicion, which no sober man ought to entertain, since it cannot be founded on truth, is the only return I have for all my pains. I am altogether ignorant whether to ascribe the grounds of your indignation to your own weakness; or to certain whisperers about you of whom I know nothing, since I am not conscious of having offended any of your people; or to my detractors who may have murmured in your Lordship's ears something to my disadvantage. But, however I may be prejudged by you, I will not challenge you as my prejudiced judge. Rather I desire that you yourself, father, should be both witness and judge of my deserts or demerits. If ever so small an amount of blame or criminality can be found in me in the matter in question, I promise that I will pay whatever penalty you may choose to exact. The sum and substance of your complaint is this: You blame me because that immediately after I had been refreshed at your cheerful and well-furnished

table, with a joyful countenance and in the kindest manner, for which I return your paternity my most humble thanks, you were served on my authority with an inhibition touching Boveney Chapel ; and besides that, that you were cited on too short notice without having seen or had a copy of the tenor of the charges. You add that I, who, unworthy as I am, am Judge of the supreme Court of the whole province, ought to be well advised what issues under my seal, and particularly against any of the prelates. I begin from the last remark, and beg you to be well assured that I never have been, nor ever will be, so inconsiderate as to allow anything to issue under that seal, so long as I shall hold it, which has not been first seen and carefully inspected by my own eyes ; and what can and ought to issue according to the practice and style hitherto used in that Court, and the requirement of the law. But that the messenger of the Court served the citation at an unseasonable time, or gave too short notice, or refused you a sight or copy of the letters, supposing even he had cited you for the morrow, why on earth am I to be blamed for that ? It is altogether his fault, if there is any fault in the matter. He it is that injures you, not the Judge, who allowed in his letters a fitting time for your appearing. . . . I should wish to know how you would like to be blamed for the delinquencies of your underlings under similar circumstances ? I suppose no one would so far flatter himself as to imagine that I may not act on the depositions of any one subject to you, without exciting your wrath. Why in that case I should be guilty of downright perjury, who am sworn not to raise obstacles to the action of the Court. Yet, I say, for the singular affection which I bear you, I have refused or forborne to act against you or yours. . . . This one thing I venture to boast, whatever you think of me, father : I am not so foolish, so unmannerly, so brutish, as, when I am breaking bread at your table, to be meditating some ungrateful and sneaking proceeding against you. So far from it that, if I had had the remotest idea of anything of the kind, nothing should have induced me to cross your threshold. May I never see the face of the living God if, while I was at your table, I had any more thought of your citation than the babe that was born yesterday. The truth is, those letters were sealed long before you ever touched on the subject with me.

Now, most righteous father, assume the office of judge, and punish me, if in all this I have offended at all. If you absolve me, I ask nothing more; if your mouth condemn me, I appeal to my conscience. That certainly will acquit me. . . . I pray you, therefore, most loving father, to continue to cherish a favourable opinion of him who not only does not attempt, but not even meditate, any thing which does not deserve your favour and gratitude; and be so fair as not to suffer your violent passion to get the better of you, until your reason has examined the truth of the allegations. If you wish it, I am yours in duty and service. If you spurn my duty, still I will be yours in purpose and intention. I pray God grant you many happy years.

I pass on now to the circumstances under which Bekynton was promoted to the See of Bath and Wells. It will be remembered that at the time of which I speak the appointment to all the sees in England belonged to the Pope. The Crown exercised a right of nomination, indeed, which was almost universally confirmed by the Pope's appointment, when the Government was sufficiently strong to make a collision between the temporal and spiritual authority appear undesirable to the Pope's advisers. And in confirmation of this view of the Papal policy, I may remark in passing that, while I do not find in my volume a single example of the King's nominee being rejected by the Pope for any see in England or Ireland, I do not find a single instance of his nomination being accepted for any see in those parts of France where the kings of England had long exercised sovereign power, which was equally claimed by Henry VI. as by his predecessors, but where many disastrous reverses had now so weakened his tenure that the Pope could safely disregard his claims to jurisdiction in ecclesiastical matters. Bekynton, however, clearly judged that no harm would be done by conciliating the favour of the Pope and Cardinals,

in case his royal patron should ever take it into his head to nominate him to a bishopric. He proceeded, then, on this wise. In his capacity of Private Secretary to the King he was of necessity brought into contact with the Papal Nuncios, Collectors, and other envoys of the Court of Rome who resorted to England for any purpose during the time that he was attached to the royal household. He seems assiduously to have cultivated the acquaintance of these eminent foreigners during their sojourn in this country, and not only to have kept up communication with them by letters on their return to Italy, but also to have extended his acquaintance, through their instrumentality, among the Cardinals and other influential ecclesiastics connected with the Papal Court. One Angelo Gattola, in particular, a gentleman of the Papal household, who was the bearer of the Cardinal's hat and other insignia to Archbishop Kemp, appears to have formed a close intimacy with Bekynton, which was very serviceable to the latter a few years later. But, besides these foreigners whose affections he had thus engaged, he had also a staff of friends devoted to his service among the King's envoys to the Court of Rome, who had been delegated on special services to his Holiness, either to urge the King's suit for some coveted preferment, or to procure bulls of indulgence for his newly-founded college of Eton, or for some other religious purpose near to the heart of the pious and devout Henry. Among these, Andrew Holes, afterwards Archdeacon of Wells, Richard Chester, Vincent Clement, and Richard Cauton were those most addicted to Bekynton's interest; and there are certain mysterious allusions in several of his letters to them, which seem to be explained by some later letters to the same parties, of which I shall have to give a fuller account presently. But I must first mention another

method by which the ecclesiastics of that day sometimes sought to smooth the asperities of the path which led to the higher offices of the Church (according to the motto *per aspera ad ardua tollor*), or which they sometimes met with after they had attained the very summit. Thus, e.g., Archbishop Chichely, when hard pressed in his memorable controversy with Pope Martin V., in which he so nobly defended the privileges and liberties of the English Church, thought it wise to conciliate the good will of an influential Cardinal, and for this purpose proposed to place at the disposal of his Eminence (*in aliqualem mei memoriam*) a small annual pension of fifty nobles, for wine; and, in order to ensure its punctual payment, he undertook, with the utmost delicacy, to transmit it regularly through any merchant banker whom the Cardinal should designate, so long as the Archbishop retained his present dignity. A very considerable sum, when estimated according to the present value of money, which must have gone very far towards defraying the wine merchant's bill, however princely the hospitality of the Cardinal may have been, and which might well lead him to desire that the Archbishop's tenure of his dignity might not soon terminate, and incline him to use his best exertions to avert so great a misfortune. In a similar manner, though on a more modest scale, did Bekynton dispense his benefactions in the Papal Court; and my volume contains letters from Blondo of Forli, the Pope's Secretary, from Bartholomew de Rovarella, the Pope's Chamberlain, and from the Cardinal Treasurer of the Pope, acknowledging with thanks presents of cloth which they had received from him. I cannot give you full particulars of these presents, only I should guess that they were more valuable than the rings which he sent to Andrew Holes for distribution, ninety-

nine of silver and twelve of gold, as these must have been designed for persons of less eminence. I can happily furnish fuller details of his offering to the Pope, which are curious and interesting. He writes to his friend Richard Chester, under date May 14, 1441 :—

I am preparing for his Holiness a piece of the finest cloth (*pannum unum finissimum*), which, if I possibly can, I will send out by the Florentine galleys, and I will write further to you on the subject.

Accordingly, a little later (June 6), he writes :—

I have already written to you a letter in duplicate that you will receive from a Florentine galley a certain piece of white cloth, the very finest that can be procured here, which is to be dyed of a scarlet colour (*luteum crimesinum*) at Florence. I have sent also twenty nobles for the dyeing. Do not spare, I pray you, to have it dyed in the best possible manner, for whatever it shall cost more I will repay all. I do not wish, however, that that cloth should be presented to our most holy lord until you receive my next letter on the subject: for I intend that the King should also write his thanks for me and my friends. I also will write mine, as is meet, and together with these letters that cloth shall be presented.

And presented accordingly it was; and you may not now be unwilling to hear how it was received. And I dwell upon this the more minutely because I am hoping to shew that this piece of scarlet cloth had an important bearing on the fortunes of my hero. “A letter of the Pope concerning the affection which he bears to him to whom it is written” is the modest rubric prefixed to the following :—

Beloved son, health and apostolic benediction. We have understood what our beloved son Vincent Clement, our Sub-deacon, has expounded to us on your part, from whom you will learn what is our disposition towards you—which we affirm to be most favourable. But we have received your little present, and a handsome one it is, and sent, as we know, with this

design, that we might have in it a proof of your great affection and devotion towards us. We embrace, therefore, the devout inclination of your mind, and are disposed, when the opportunity offers, to reward your virtue according to its merits.

Given at Florence, under our secret signet, the 20th day of May, in the year of our Lord 1442, the twelfth of our pontificate.

His Holiness was as good as his word. Within a twelvemonth Bekynton's friend, Angelo Gattola, writes to congratulate him on his nomination to the bishopric of Salisbury, which had been procured by the unremitting exertions of Richard Chester and his own. He writes in great glee :—

How earnestly Master Richard, according to his pre-eminent virtue and singular prudence, has wrought with our most holy lord night and day with all his zeal, to increase your honours, is well known to myself, who have never at any time omitted any earnest exertion to accomplish the same object. From all which it has at length resulted, that our most holy lord has chosen your right reverend lordship to the bishopric of Salisbury. Therefore we are all consoled by so great a boon that no greater consolation or pleasure could possibly arrive.

And this he repeats again and again in almost identical words.

I must now explain how it was proposed to create a vacancy in the See of Salisbury in order to make room for Bekynton ; since William Aiscough, the actual bishop, did not vacate it until the year 1450, when he was murdered by the insurgents at the altar of Edyngdon Collegiate Church. A comparison of dates will shew that the voidance of the See of Salisbury was a matter of perfect indifference to Bekynton. Angelo Gattola's letter is dated Sienna, May 23, 1443, and would, under ordinary circumstances, be a month or six weeks on its way. It crossed on the road a letter from the King to the Pope, recommending Bekynton for the Bishopric of Bath and Wells, and letters

from Bekynton himself to all his friends at Rome, to Andrew Holes, Blondo of Forli, Bartholomew of Rovarella, and Angelo Gattola, to inform them of his nomination, and to tell them that now was the time for his friends to exert themselves to secure his promotion. The letters are dated the 27th of April, 1443, nearly a month earlier than that of Angelo Gattola informing him of his appointment to the See of Sarum. The explanation is this, and it will shew that Bekynton's friends at Rome were only too zealous in his service. On the death of Archbishop Chichely in 1443, April 12, John Stafford, Bishop of Bath and Wells (whom Chichely had nominated as his successor, when he contemplated resigning a year before his death) was recommended by the King to the metropolitan See; and it was in contemplation to translate Bishop Aiscough of Sarum to Bath and Wells, and to promote Bekynton to Sarum. Bekynton's friends, having learnt that such were the intentions of the King, set to work at once to give effect to them, with what success we have already heard. The only hitch was that Aiscough was not disposed to leave Salisbury; and the precipitancy of Bekynton's friends involved some inconvenience, as we learn from a letter of the King to Archdeacon Holes, his proctor at the Papal Court:—

Venerable and sincerely beloved in Christ,—Your diligence, and pains, and labours, which, with ardent desire and without delay, we know that you have industriously and effectually applied, concerning the translations of the Revd. Fathers in Christ the Bishops of Bath and Sarum, and the promotion of our entirely beloved clerk, Thomas Bekynton, according to our letters which we have many times transmitted on that matter, we are bound to acknowledge as extremely pleasing and praiseworthy; but that you have so hastily and precipitately expended the moneys of our clerk aforesaid, altogether before you had full and certain notice of the assent of the said Bishop

of Sarum, we cannot equally approve. For if these moneys, so laid out by you, cannot be converted into the firstfruits of the church of Bath, as reason and conscience dictate,—particularly since, as things now are, he cannot anyhow obtain the church of Sarum,—it is evident that our said clerk, owing to that too great haste of yours, after and above those very large expenses which he has already borne in our Embassy, will be by no means able to bear that loss. Neither indeed shall we ourselves bear it patiently or without displeasure. Strive therefore, trusty and beloved, to rectify all that has been done—earnestly and lovingly indeed, but without sufficient consideration; for we hope that if you take pains, those holy and devout fathers will by no means wish to retain what our said clerk has laid out to no purpose, and which cannot be retained with a safe conscience by any of those who have received it.

“From our Castle of Windsor, June 24, A.D. 1443.”

How this serious difficulty was overcome I am not in a position to state; but we may hope that the Cardinals, being such as they are here described, would not require our Bishop elect to pay his firstfruits twice over. It is certain that the King's nomination did take effect, and that, within four months of the date of the letter which I have just read, all difficulties were removed, and Thomas Bekynton was consecrated Bishop, under circumstances so interesting to all old Etonians that I shall translate this record as it is entered in his Register, which is preserved among the archives of the See. It is entitled—

The Register of the Rev. Lord and Father in Christ, Mr. Thomas Bekynton, Bishop of Bath and Wells, who was consecrated by the Lord Father in Christ, William, Bishop of Lincoln [Alnwick], in the old collegiate church of Blessed Mary of Eton, on the Lord's Day, viz., on the Feast of S. Edward, the 13th day of the month of October, A.D. 1443, the 13th year of the Pontificate of the most Rev. Father in Christ, Lord Eugenius IV., by Divine Providence Pope, the 7th indication. On which day the same Thomas, after his consecration, celebrated his first Mass *in pontificalibus* in the New Church of

Blessed Mary at the same place, not as yet half built, under a tent at the altar, erected directly over the place where King Henry VI. had laid the first stone; and there in the new building of the college, on the north side, while as yet the chambers below were not partitioned off, he held his banquet. On that day were present as assisting Bishops, William Bishop of Sarum, and Nicholas Bishop of Llandaff; on which day of the year the present Register was begun.

This beginning of the register should be the conclusion of my biographical notices,—for the history of his episcopate is, as I have already intimated, too wide a sea for me to embark upon,—but for a brief correspondence between our Bishop and the Abbat of Glastonbury, which I think may be interesting to the Meeting, not only from local associations, but as illustrating the old dispute on the subject of jurisdiction between the Bishops and the regular Clergy. It is, further, so thoroughly characteristic of Bishop Bekynton's tone and temper that I think I cannot better conclude than with an account of this controversy, which I presume took place in 1445, in the second year of his consecration, when Nicholas Frome was Abbat of Glastonbury (elected 1420, died 1456, as appears from *Dugdale's Monasticon*). I am led to give this date by two letters which I find in the Bishop's Register, one addressed to the Abbat of Glastonbury, warning him not to attempt anything to the prejudice of the pending Episcopal Visitation, dated June 10, 1445; the other, appointing a Commission for continuing the Visitation, which is dated July 18 of the same year. I have no doubt that the undated letters which I proceed to read have reference to this Visitation.

A letter of reprimand, addressed to the Abbat of Glastonbury, on his unkind interpretation of the acts of his Bishop on his Visitation, and wishes he may recover his wits.

My dearest brother in Christ,—I am certainly very much

surprised and astonished at what I have just, since my arrival, heard of the doings of your fraternity.

For it might easily seem from them that by some sinister interpretation everything that I have determined to do or to direct, in sincere zeal always for your honour and the good of your house, is represented in an unfavourable light; and I see that your choler is provoked, and that you are irritated and indignant at what, as the result will clearly show, ought to have earned me your favourable consideration. God and my own conscience are my witnesses that I do not seek, nor ever will seek, anything at all of you but what is for God's honour and your own, and the benefit of your house. That, I dare boldly assert, you shall feel and be sensible of, and see with your own eyes.

Do not, my brother, either on any light suspicion, or for the whispering of any men, put a slight on your father, whom for so long a time you have experienced to be faithful to your interests, and have found to be of approved honour, and diligent in your service.

If any evil spirit whatever is trying to sow anger or indignation between us, 'prove the spirits, whether they be of God,' and hear and prove me; do not render hatred for my good will. If a third tongue is busying itself to separate us from one another, I would it were cut off, whosoever it be. But that you may be able to make yourself entirely acquainted with me and my inmost feelings, I send you my chancellor; whom you will, I am sure, kindly and patiently hear, and give credit to the truth. I wish you heartily as good wishes as I should desire for myself.

Scribbled by my own hand at Evercreech, on this holy Sunday, 22nd of August.

Answer of the Abbat to his Bishop on the same matter.

Venerable Father and Lord, obedience, reverence, and honour.—We cannot write to you as we could wish, for the eyes of our outer man are darkened with sickness and old age. Yet, of old the Good Shepherd, Christ our Lord, who laid down His life for the sheep, took the lost sheep on His shoulders and brought it back mercifully into His fold. The wounded man

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who had fallen among thieves He set on His own beast and brought him to the inn (in the bowels of His mercies), saying to the host that he should take care of him, pouring in oil and wine. To the penitent prodigal he gave the best robe and ring, for He had recovered him who had wasted his substance. Yet, beforetime the same Good Shepherd complained that the swollen wound was not bound up, nor anointed with oil, nor mollified with ointment. And, likewise, according to the measure of our lowliness, as conscience dictates, we may complain to you with agony because, if the wounds of sins have been, as you say, discovered amongst us, they have not been, under the long adjournment of your Visitation, purged out and corrected, as they ought to have been. Very probable it is that they will putrify, and, as one diseased sheep corrupts the whole flock, these will stain and corrupt the whole mass. And so we are forced finally to cry out with the rest to heaven, that our God will have mercy upon us; because, neither in the hastening of the feet, nor in the words of promises, nor in the fingers of writers, but in the hands of workers we put the anchor of our hope, desiring that a Visitation, instituted holily and righteously, should result in edification and not in destruction: for judicially we are ignorant what account we shall have shortly to render for the flock committed to us.

And therefore, among the other diversities of graces, we under the compulsion of necessity, most especially aspire to the grace of curing; because, by the dictate of our sacred rule, we are obliged to tear up by the roots the vices of those subject to us. But in other things which concern the right and defence of the law of our Church, according as the case demands and requires, we proceed by determination of our Council, and so will we proceed, as by mutual faith we are bound. And may He confer on you the grace of reigning together with Him who gives to you the power of governing the people.

Written at Pulton, August 27.

Reply of the same Bishop to the representations made against him, and justification of all those things which were alleged to have been done by the said Bishop.

Your letter, my dearest brother in Christ, has been in no small degree pleasant to me, but in deed and truth it would

have been pleasanter still if it had answered to the kindness and gentleness of my own. But, however it may be, I have put this law upon myself, that I will not, even under the provocation of the utmost ingratitude or abuse, wittingly do anything by which I can either offend God or violate the sanctity of justice, or go beyond the limits of moderation and fatherly affection. The blindness of your eyes, my dear brother, of which you complain in your letter, I, for my part, as I am bound by our ancient familiar friendship, am sorry to hear of; and I wish with all my heart that no disease of the sort may attack the eyes of your mind and inner man. Whilst you write, moreover, that our kind Father, our Lord Jesus Christ, brought back the lost sheep to the fold and set the wounded man on His own beast, and had him brought into the inn, and wine and oil poured into his wounds; please to believe that it is our desire and intention to follow the footsteps of our dear Lord in those matters, as power shall be given us from above. As for the charge of delay which you make against me, you ought to have known that he is not delaying who is detained by a lawful impediment. When the same our dear Lord went down to the healing of Lazarus, He found that he had been in the grave three days. All things have their time; there is still, I trust in the Lord a fit time to heal, whilst he who ought to be the healer has both will and power to go down personally to the patient and to apply with his own hands either fomentations or the knife, as shall be needed. Order, my brother, is confounded when the son is seen to judge his father, the subject to try his judge. The ruling of time, which is committed to the will of the superior, is unworthily called into judgment by the inferior. It is right, my brother, that what you claim from your inferiors you should yourself pay to your superior. As to the charge which you seem to allege, that the adjournment of my Visitation redounds not to the edification of regular observance, but to its destruction (which God forbid) I wonder that so prudent a man should be so foolish: for you know that I have never taken away from you the power of exercising and executing of all things that pertain to regular discipline; nay, that I have expressly, and with abundant verbal authorization, granted it to you. I believe, my brother, that if your mind were free from

anger and hatred you would neither have judged nor conjectured so about me ; for these dazzle the eye of reason and do not permit the mind to see the truth. If you have not understood me sufficiently well in my Visitation of the Monastery over which you are set, you might and may still acquaint yourself with me in all the Visitations which I have made in other religious houses, and learn whether I have anywhere committed any injustice. And yet I have accounted and do account myself a debtor to a greater extent to your place. As to what I wrote to you, I write it again in my whole soul and with firm conscience. God and my conscience are my witnesses that I ask nothing at all of you but what is to the honour of God and yourself and to the benefit of your house. And, indeed, I praise that desire of yours where you write that, among other diversities of graces you singularly desire the grace of curing ; but we, so to speak, desire the grace of healing also. There are many who cure ; but only very few are found who heal. Indeed, for curing a moment is sufficient ; but for healing we need both knowledge and time and Divine help to boot. We read, for instance, that Galienus cured a hundred, of whom not one recovered. But your conjuration, or rather threat, that you subjoin, namely, that ‘in the other things which concern the right and the defence of the right of your church, you proceed, and will proceed by determination of your council,’ I take in good part ; and I wish that the angel of good council may provide you with the best and most wholesome advice ; and I hope that you in your old age will depend upon and adhere to him rather than to your own fancy or affection, or to any little flatteries or slanders whatsoever. For that which is according to God will stand. But as far as concerns the defence of the right of your church, our desire is that this counsel or purpose of yours may turn out to the full benefit of yourself and your house, and that you will never run any risk of erring in your opinion in any point in which you are flattering yourself that you are defending and preserving the rights and privileges of your church ; nor may the thing itself and the result prove that you have really been acting prejudicially to the same. I, for my part, as I always have been, am now also ready and prepared to rise up with you and to exert myself to the utmost of my power for the defence of your church and

for the preservation of the rights and privileges thereof, as a matter very pleasing and desirable to myself. But, brother, I wish you would consider one thing, — that you are not bound to your church by any closer ties than I am to mine. But if, perchance, any one of my officials or commissaries has committed any grievance to you or to your house, which certainly I neither expect nor acknowledge, I wish to confer with you on everything touching the question, when you shall please, with a good will, patiently, and with the affection of a father, and to be clearly advised by you how the truth stands: and, consequently, if any matters rightly require reformation, willingly, and indeed thankfully, according to God and justice, to reform them all, and to shew myself a just and kind father in all things to you and yours; to whom I wish good health that shall last happily to a great age.

From our Manor of Woky, August 30.

It will be manifest from the specimens of Bishop Bekynton's correspondence which I have now given that there was at least quite as much of the *fortiter in re* as of the *suaviter in modo* in his official dealings; and the same fact might be further exemplified in his other relations by his correspondence with John of Wheathampstead, Abbat of St. Albans, with Dr. Millington, first Provost of King's College, Cambridge, and with Henry, Duke of Somerset, — which last at least shews that he was "no respecter of persons."

But it is time for me to bring these notices to a close, which I think I shall do in the manner most interesting to my audience if I give you a description of this city and its inhabitants during Bekynton's episcopate, by which you will be enabled to institute a comparison between its present aspect and condition and what it was four hundred years ago. It is, perhaps, rather highly coloured, as became a writer who was not only a native of the city, but a bosom friend of the Bishop, by whom he was

appointed Chancellor of the diocese of Wells in 1454.

It is in the form of an imaginary dialogue between this Thomas Chaundler, under the name of Panestinus, and a companion whom he calls Ferrandus, who has accompanied him from Oxford, and whom he purposes to lionize over Wells and to introduce him to his old acquaintance the Bishop.

Ferrandus had spoken of the place which they were entering somewhat disrespectfully as "a small town." Panestinus, jealous for the dignity of his native place, rejoins :—

You might more properly call it a city than a town, as you would yourself understand more clearly than day if you could behold all its intrinsic splendour and beauty. For that most lovely church which we see at a distance, dedicated to the most blessed Apostle of the Almighty God, St. Andrew, contains the episcopal chair of the worthy Bishop. Adjoining it is the vast palace, adorned with wonderful splendour, girt on all sides by flowing waters, crowned by a delectable succession of walls and turrets, in which the most worthy and learned Bishop Thomas, the first of that name, bears rule. He has, indeed, at his own proper pains and charges, conferred such a splendour on this city, as well by strongly fortifying the church with gates and towers and walls, as by constructing on the grandest scale the palace in which he resides and the other surrounding buildings, that he deserves to be called, not the founder merely, but rather the splendour and ornament of the church.

What honour, what liberality, what honesty of all kinds, think you, will you find in the noble and facetious Dean, and in the other prelates whom they call Canons? Monastic in their habits, clerics in life and honesty, illustrious for their hospitality, agreeable and affable to strangers, benevolent to all, such you may see them to be at the first glance, and then will find by experience that they are. For so pressing are they in their attentions to strangers and pilgrims, that they seem to vie with one another who shall invite whom and

provide for his entertainment. But besides all this, the inherent charity of the inferior clergy, whom they call Vicars, the orderly behaviour and unity of the citizens, the most just laws, the excellent police regulations, the delectable situation of the place, the cleanliness of the streets, the neatness of the houses, the thoroughly prudent people, the adornment, the beauty, the loveliness, the sweetness of all, perfect and duly decorate the city. Its name is Wells, so called by its ancient inhabitants from the gushing wells that are found there.

He concludes by inviting his friend to accompany him to the Palace, that he may introduce him to the excellent Bishop, who shows himself amiable to all, and takes excessive pains and diligence to secure the love of all; so that he courts the affections of men with all the ardour with which others pursue honour and riches, and endeavours above all things to win men themselves, being as he is a wise and prudent lover of peace.

If I cannot, as a stranger, speak from my own knowledge, and dare not presume to repeat the invitation of Panestinus, or ask you to test by experience the accuracy of my descriptions, I may at least express my conviction that those who have the privilege of access to the Palace, the Deanery, the Canons' residences, the Vicars' Close, or the tidy houses of the citizens, will bear their joyful testimony to the fact that the city of Wells, barring the defacement of its noble cathedral by the iconoclastic frenzy of the Great Rebellion, has undergone no deterioration, whether in its natural, or architectural, or ecclesiastical, or civic aspects, since the days of its good Bishop Bekynton.
