

PETERBOROUGH

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Peterborough by Geo. Ayliffe Poole

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PETERBOROUGH

PETERBOROUGH,

DIOCESAN HISTORIES.

PETERBOROUGH.

BY

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P R E F A C E.

THE Church of Saxulf at Medeshamsted had already numbered some four centuries when Remigius, the first Norman Bishop of the diocese, founded the minster which crowns the heights of Lincoln, and thither transferred his episcopal throne from Dorchester in Oxfordshire. Ours, therefore, is the more ancient *Cathedral*, though the mother *Diocese* is the more illustrious.

Our earliest annals are neither obscure nor uninteresting.

The legend of Wolfade and Rufinc,—the characters and work of Saxulf and his royal companions,—the destruction of the church by the Danes, and its restoration by Edgar and Ethelwold, could not well be spared from the history of the Church and Kingdom. And in later times it is remarkable how many events belong, locally or personally, to the Diocese of Peterborough, which claim, from their intrinsic importance, a place in general history.

The struggles of Anselm, for instance, with Rufus, and of Becket with Henry II., cannot be told circumstantially without reference to Rockingham and to Northampton. The names of Richard Cœur de Lion and of Archbishop Baldwin are indelibly in-

scribed on the roll of Pipewell Abbey. Katharine of Arragon and Mary Stuart have left memorials to be rehearsed over their graves in Peterborough Cathedral, and the story of the gunpowder treason is deeply scored upon the face of Northamptonshire and Rutland. Events like these do not cease to be local history when they are transcribed on a wider page.

The first name in our list of local historians reminds us that there is a romance of books and authors, as well as of life and action.

Early in the twelfth century there was in the monastery of Burgh a child named Hugh, of whom his brother had already made a monk. As he grew up Hugh became subject to attacks of hæmorrhage, which left him with a complexion so bloodless that they called him (and we still call him) Candidus. After an attack of unusual severity his life was despaired of, and they were about to perform the last religious offices for him when Egelbrith, a man of singular holiness, persuaded them rather to go together into the church, and join in prayer for his recovery; for God, said he, would not deny them the life of one man. Hugh recovered, as if by miracle, and lived long after, beloved by the brethren, and honoured by the successive abbots, John, Henry, Martin, and Waterville. At his death he was sub-prior, and his brother Remaldus, prior.

It had been the loving labour of Hugh's life to write the history of his house, a labour which was taken up by Robert Swapham, who completed the volume. It need hardly be said that "Swapham," for thus was the manuscript called, was reckoned one of the

chief treasures of the Church. So at the sacking of the cathedral by Cromwell's troopers, it was hid for security by the precentor, Humfrey Austin, under his seat in the choir. There it was found by one of the rebels, but Mr. Austin redeemed it for ten shillings, for which sum the fellow gave the following receipt:—"I pray let this scripture book alone, for he hath paid me for it, and therefore I would desire you to let it alone. By me, Henry Topcliffe, souldier under Captain Cromwell, Colonel Cromwell's son, therefore I pray let it alone."

But the fortunes of "Swapham" are not all told. It has since been delivered out of the limbo of danger and obscurity, being printed in "Sparkes' Collection."

To "Swapham," as chronicler of the abbey, succeeds Abbot John of Calais, and after him we have the anonymous author of the *Chronicon Petroburgense*.

Of equal authority and of the deepest interest are the letters of the commissioners under Thomas Cromwell, for the suppression of monasteries, published by the Camden Society.

These local chronicles owe a part of their interest to their antique form and character. Not so "The History of the Church of Peterborough," by Symon Gunton, late prebendary of the church, who was ejected from the first stall in the great rebellion. Gunton's volume was republished, with a preface and appendix, by Patrick, Dean of Peterborough, afterwards Bishop of Ely.

One other book we must mention with due honour—"The Church History of Britain, endeavoured by Thomas Fuller." Fuller's contributions to our dio-

cesan history are, of course, only occasional ; but he was born in the diocese, and lived and suffered in it, and his cheerful, impulsive, and somewhat egotistical garrulity, together with his quickness to note the interesting side of his surroundings, make him an amusing as well as a valuable *raconteur*. We should be sorry indeed to lose his stories, be they grave or gay.

PART I.
Saxon Period.

CHAPTER I.

FOUNDATION OF MEDESHAMSTED.

The Kingdom of Mercia—The Bishopric of Lincoln—Heathen State of Mercia—Saxulf founds the Monastery of Medeshamsted—Legend of Wulfade and Rufine.

“The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them.”

THE kingdom of Mercia consisted of the present counties of Lincoln, Northampton, Rutland, Huntingdon, Buckingham, Oxford, Worcester, Warwick, Derby, Nottingham, Leicester, with part of Hereford and of Salop. Extensive as the kingdom was, it had, according to the usual arrangement of Saxon times, but one bishop, whose home (if he can be said to have had a home) was successively at Leicester,¹ Lichfield, Dorchester in Oxfordshire, and Lincoln. But our early bishops might very well say of themselves that

¹ So that Leicester is in a sense more ancient than Peterborough as a bishop's see.