

## NOTES ON THE ANCIENT HOSPITAL

pp 46-76 of *THE PARISH OF St. JOHN BAPTIST, BRIDGWATER*

by

H. EARDLEY FIELD & T. BRUCE DILKS

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### THE HOSPITAL OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

by T. Bruce Dilks.

#### INTRODUCTION

Just a word by way of introduction on the part played by the imagination in writing and reading history. It is essential and we cannot ignore it, if we would picture the past before our mind's eye. Even in Father Field's narrative of the last hundred years we must call it to our aid. Some of his characters we remember, and others, happily, are still with us. But the more remote—the founder of the church, the distinguished naturalist, the cardinal—even though we are helped by portrait and reminiscence, need our imagination to fit them into their surroundings.

Far more is it necessary to the story I have to tell. Many of my characters are nameless, and where we have names, they mean little or nothing to us. The people of those remoter days were like us, yet unlike. They were superstitious, even more than we are ; they were ignorant, even more than we are ; they were certainly more cruel ; they were coarser, ruder, rougher in word and deed. Yet within, they were just as human as we are.

Do not fear to use your imagination. Only keep your facts as utterly sacred, don't ignore them, don't twist them. When you go up Eastover, believe that you are passing under the arch of the East Gate, believe that you can hear the voices of the brethren chanting their plain-song, believe that you can hear their bells ringing for Corpus Christi day. It is all true.

On the east side of Monmouth Street, opposite St. John's vicarage, there is a collection of carved stonework which can hardly fail to attract the attention of the passer by. When I first saw it some fifty or sixty years ago, my curiosity was roused, and since then I have formed, a theory as to its origin. A theory however is not history, and this of mine must be regarded as purely speculative. But I have an idea that a former occupant of the house before which it stands had this stonework conveyed from some not very distant heap of medieval ruins and placed in front of his dwelling as a pleasing reminder of a long past age. That man I

believe to have been a somewhat eccentric Quaker named John Clark, who was born in the 18th century and was still alive when St. John's Church was founded. He was an inventor and perhaps the best known of his inventions is the air-cushion which has brought ease and comfort to many thousands of sufferers all the world over. The ruin from which he had the stonework brought to his door, I believe to have been that of the hospital of St. John the Baptist. This religious house with its church, its infirmary, its cloisters and its grounds, covered a considerable area partly outside and partly inside the east gate of the town, which arched Eastover just about where the Commercial Hotel stands to-day. It is of this hospital that I have undertaken to tell the story in these pages and I know of no more fitting point at which to begin than these carved relics which, except for some rather uninteresting walling, are all there is to shew of what was once one of the fairest and most important ecclesiastical buildings in Somerset

The community within this institution was dissolved, by royal order, four hundred years ago. Its members were dispersed and its buildings fell into ruin. For more than three centuries the master and brethren, through succeeding generations, had with varying devotion performed the duties allotted to them, though at times they had so seriously neglected them, as to incur severe rebuke from the bishop. What these duties were will gradually appear.

The word "hospital" had a wider significance in those days, than it has in ours. At the root of the word lies the idea of the relationship existing between the host and his guest. The word 'hospitality' has preserved it. A hospital was an institution which exercised hospitality. Christ's Hospital was not a place of healing, but a school for the education of poor scholars. Greenwich Hospital was an endowed refuge for naval veterans. The Foundling Hospital we should now call a children's home or orphanage. And so while a hospital might be founded for the treatment and relief of the sick poor, it might also have, as its object, the care of the aged poor or the education of poor children or the entertainment of the pilgrim and wayfarer. Any of these aims was regarded as an object of piety,

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and a building so dedicated was known as a "God's House."

William Briwer, who founded our borough, was a statesman of no mean stature. He served four English kings in succession and he served them—even the worst of them—faithfully and well. For his policy was the maintenance of the central power against the rising unrest of the baronage. Thus at Runnymede, he was found standing at King John's side and not on that of the authors of the Great Charter. The positions he occupied about the throne, no doubt, afforded an opportunity for the accumulation of wealth, and he must have had a considerable fortune to be able to build, not only the great stronghold of Bridgwater castle, but also the Cistercian abbey of Dunkeswell in Devon, where he was subsequently buried, and the spacious hospital by our East Gate.

If we knew more about his private character—and we know very little indeed—we might better understand the motive which prompted him to found these religious houses. Where the building of an abbey or a church is in question, we talk rather glibly about our pious ancestors. But though a truly religious intention entered into the plans of some of these medieval builders, there remained a large class with no loftier purpose in view than that of effecting a composition with Heaven, for the errors of their ways or of manifesting a material penance for some particular crime of which they stood guilty. Even the saintly archbishop Anselm did not hesitate to recommend the foundation of a religious house as a sure ladder to bliss. Be this as it may, William Briwer determined to build in Bridgwater a hospital for "Christ's poor."

His first need was to acquire a royal licence—for a consideration. This the king granted, not unmindful of benefit to his own soul, and sanctioned the endowment of the house by its founder with a hundred acres of land in the "vill" of Bridgwater. He allowed, also, that any one taking up a burghage in the lands belonging to the hospital, should rank as a burgher of the borough and enjoy the like privileges. As a further source of revenue, the parish church was given to the brethren of the new foundation, reserving always a sum of five pounds yearly for the monks of Bath; for when Briwer had recovered the advowson

of St. Mary's from Bath abbey, it had been stipulated that they should receive that annual sum, and the liability was now passed on to the hospital. This gift also, the king was pleased to confirm. Thus within a few years, the men of Bridgwater, saw a second building of high importance rise in their midst. If the castle stood for the great, though waning, power of the feudal aristocracy, this hospital was destined for the next three hundred years and more, to represent the enormous influence which the Church wielded in the middle ages.

Leland, the 16th century antiquary, tells us in his itinerary that "this house standith partely withoute the est gate." To-day, as we know too well, it stands there no longer. The site is mostly built over and only some doubtful walling remains. Yet, as he tells us, the building was a notable thing, and though we have not even the foundations for guidance, nor any picture of its elevation to help us, it may be possible from chance mention of certain of its parts and from what may still be seen of buildings of a like purpose surviving elsewhere to reconstruct it, though imperfectly, in our mind's eye.

We may think of the institution as divided into two distinct sections, if not three. There was the house proper, the dwelling of the brethren. There was the infirmary, as Bishop Jocelyn calls it in the rule or ordinance which, with the co-operation of the founder and the assent of both his chapters of Bath and Wells, he drew up in 1219, for the discipline of the house. And there was the chapel which was common to the house and the infirmary. The house had in general the components which we associate with such an institution. From documentary evidence we know that there was the refectory in which the brethren dined and supped together; the dormitory to which they retired for rest and sleep; the chapter-house in which they transacted the business of the convent; the cloister in which they sought recreation and exercise; a parlour which looked out on the cloister; a garden wherein grew their herbs, simples and vegetables; a stew or fish-pond for the supply of Friday's larder; all these we read of and can mentally restore.

Of the infirmary, the part of the institution devoted to the sick poor, we have no description, though we are told that the

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women attendants on the patients occupied and slept in a cell or chamber there, so that they might be ready by day or night to minister to their needs. But we do not know whether the patients were placed in one large room with beds ranged against the walls as in a modern hospital, or in such a room divided into cubicles or in a series of small separate rooms.

If the usual medieval construction of such infirmaries was followed, the chapel would be so placed that the patients, if able, might easily reach it, or, if bed-ridden, might hear the daily mass from where they lay. Like the parish church this chapel bore the ascription of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

We owe it to William of Worcester, the 15th century chronicler and traveller, that we are able to have some idea of its size, it was his habit to measure the length of churches, bridges and other buildings with which he met in his wanderings about the country. His standard of measurement was termed by him "steppys," and these steps or paces do not seem to have been more than about 18 inches long. He paced the stone bridge crossing the Parret and estimated it at 70 "steppys." He paced the chapel of the hospital and estimated it at 64 "steppys." From this record we get the impression of a building by no means small. Compare it with St. John's. Indeed the whole establishment—house, infirmary, cloister, chapel, garden, fish-pond, graveyard and other probable adjuncts, such as stables for the horses and mules of travellers—must have covered a considerable area.

In what category of the Church are these brothers to be placed? One hears them spoken of as monks. Monks they were certainly not. They belonged to no monastic order. One hears them spoken of as friars. They were not friars, for the "little brothers of St. Francis" had not yet reached this country, nor were they ever associated with this sort of work. Those who have written of them as Augustinian Canons have been nearer the mark, though it was many years before they were spoken of as such. In all documents concerning their origin and for long afterwards, they are called simply the master or warden, or prior and brethren of the hospital of St. John the Baptist of Bridgwater, and it is safe for us so to call them. At least in

doing so we shall not err.

Bishop Jocelin's ordinance or rule for the conduct of the house and the administration of the infirmary sufficed until, shortly before the close of the century, enlarged endowments suggested an increase in the number of the brethren and an extension of works on behalf of "Christ's poor." In it he laid down a general line of conduct for the convent of "clerical brethren" who under their master were to govern themselves in this "God's house." Without too close definition, he said, they should model theirs on the pattern of other houses of a like or similar order or religion. The rule was not severe. There is no mention of discipline beyond obedience to the rule and to the master, and him they were to elect from among them-selves. The absence of any catalogue of penalties for ill-conduct seems to indicate that a bishop of those days expected a fairly high standard of living among clerics who accepted this vocation. In view of what happened many years later the fact is not unworthy of note.

The power of the master over the convent was not absolute. He might for instance fill any vacancies that occurred, but only with the consent of the brethren. And yet he was the chief cleric in the town. As the head of a college who were rectors of the parish church and large landowners in the "vill," he stood before all other clergy in the town and was a very important personage. It was his duty, again with the assent of the brethren, to present one of their number or some other eligible clerk to the vicarage of the parish. To the same church it was his duty also, to present a secular chaplain who would, we may presume, have charge of the chantry of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In addition to the tithes of Bridgwater, we learn from the ordinance, that, the hospital had received the church of Northover standing on the Fosseway hard by by Ilchester, and that of Ile Brewers, a small village belonging to the founder, halfway between Langport and Iminster. The offerings in the castle were also to be theirs and in return they were to supply a priest or secular chaplain to celebrate daily in the chapel there, for which the lord was to provide all books, vestments, vessels and lights and whatever else was necessary for service. Should the lord be in residence and

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desire observance of the canonical hours, that duty should also be performed. The sight of the brethren passing to and fro to such duties and mixing freely with laymen soon became familiar to the townsfolk. The clerical habits of the brethren, displaying on the mantle or other outer garment a black or dark cross—Leland says, on the breast—distinguished them from other clergy.

Bishop Jocelin's rule also provided regulations for the administration of the infirmary. One of the brethren was to be put in charge of it, responsible however to the master. He was to carry out his duties to the best of his ability, which may not have been of much medical value, and within the means of the hospital. The nurses who assisted him were strictly limited to three in number. They were not to be of gentle blood, but just ordinary women fit for such duties, of established good reputation and willing to devote themselves to the service of "Christ's poor." To the classes of patients, who might be admitted to the infirmary, there were certain exceptions. Maternity cases, insanity and epilepsy and above all leprosy and any other contagious diseases, were to be rigidly excluded, and if through inadvertence, any infectious malady had found a way in, it was to be turned out forthwith. This does not mean, be it understood, that the care of the victims of leprosy, that terrible scourge of the middle ages, was neglected in this country. There was distinct provision for the leper by means of special hospitals or in other ways.

Lastly, the bishop thought well to lay down some prohibitions for the future good of the house. He warned the brethren not to part with any of the gifts which had been made by the pious for the benefit of the poor, nor to mortgage their properties, nor to enter lightly on any undertaking involving perpetual charges on the foundation. Further, he shields the convent from the intrusion of rich and powerful visitors on their hospitality, even if they should be patrons or ecclesiastical ordinaries. These, he said, have no right to obtrude themselves or their horses on the hospitality of the brethren, and if they do so let them be anathema. Rather they should be the conservators and protectors of the rule.

The full dedication of the hospital, we learn from an entry in Bishop Ralph's register

in the next century, was in honour of God, the most Blessed Virgin Mary His Mother, and of St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist. An impression of the seal of the convent survives. It is described as vesica-shaped,  $2\frac{5}{8}$  inches by  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inches, showing Our Lady and the Child on the parapet of a four-arched bridge over a river. St. John the Baptist, holding *Agnus Dei* on a roundel, stands on the left, and St. Paul, with sword and book, on the right. The whole design is enclosed in a niche with triple canopy, and what remains of the legend runs —

S'. COMVNE . HOSPITALIS . SANCTI .  
(JOHANNI)S . BAPTISTE . DE . (BRUGGEW)ALTERI.

Such was the common seal—*sigillum commune*—of our hospital

And so the house was established and set forward on the road of its long life. We cannot follow the years of that life in continuity. Rather we shall be like spectators of a series of scenes and shall see the curtain lifted from time to time and be able thus to look on some of the good fortunes and some of the ill fortunes of what Leland saw to be "a notable thing."

Indeed, if we follow our records in chronological order, we find in a manuscript dated only three years later than Bishop Jocelin's ordinance reference to a contribution to the endowment of the hospital. Disputes had arisen between the prior and convent of Goldcliff, a cell of the famous Benedictine abbey of Bec, standing on the Monmouthshire coast, and Philip de Columbers, a Somerset magnate. A papal commission had been appointed to arrange their differences, and this document, dated 1222, proclaims the settlement arrived at. The only clause that concerns us here allows that "the same monks are entirely released from the pensions which they are held to pay to the canons of Wells and the hospitallers of Bridgwater on behalf of the churches of Stowey and Woolavington." It may be suggested that it was the latter gift only that came to our hospital. Later in the century we shall find the convent linked with the church of Woolavington.

In the year 1226 the long life of the founder came to an end and his body was laid with the pomp belonging to so great a dignitary below the pavement in front of the high altar of his Devon abbey of Dunkeswell.

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He was succeeded in his lordship and possessions by his son who bore the same names. Unlike his father, the second William left no mark on national or local affairs. And yet his short tenure of the lordship of our borough was distinguished by an event of great importance to its inhabitants, for Leland tells us that within those six years the grey friars first came to Bridgwater and established a house there. Dugdale, writing in the 17th century, gives the date as 1230.

Thus the two religious houses came into being. Alike in profession, yet so different in character, they were destined side by side to give direction to the religious life of the town for the next three hundred years. Alike in profession, for both claimed to love God and to love their neighbour. Different in character, for while the hospitallers remained at home to receive and minister to "Christ's poor," the friars made it their chief business to seek out and succour the lowest of the low and to share their misfortune. The brethren, owning tenements and lands and churches, dwelt in comfort; the friar claimed poverty as his bride. The brethren, we shall find, fell into ill odour by reason of their wealth and its attributes; the friars were welcomed as preachers and yet more as confessors. As time went on, the friars devoted themselves with great zeal to learning. Even in this 13th century, a Somerset boy, becoming a friar, rose to a European reputation as Roger Bacon, scientific investigator and discoverer, and in the next century Bridgwater itself was honoured in that the astronomer, John Somer, was a member of the community in Friarn Street. On the other hand we hear neither of scholar nor of library in the house by the East Gate.

It was about this time — the exact year is not known — that the hospital received the gift of a fourth church, that of Davidstowe in the county of Cornwall. The appropriation was made by yet another William Briwer, who had become Bishop of Exeter in 1224, at the request of the great justiciar, Hubert de Burgh, Earl of Kent, lord of the manor to which the advowson belonged. The earl died in 1243. Like the founder of the hospital he was a king's man and had served John faithfully. After the death of William Marshall he ruled the kingdom till the young king came to manhood, and on the whole he

ruled it well.

This then was a fourth church belonging to the hospital and there were yet more to come. Meanwhile it will be remembered that Bishop Jocelyn had laid a serious injunction on the convent, forbidding them in any circumstances to part with property which had been bestowed on them to be held in stewardship on behalf of "Christ's poor." Something of this kind seems now to have happened. Perhaps the brethren had found their treasury in need and had in consequence been tempted to part with some of their land. They had in fact alienated a piece to a man named John Bardulf. The king accordingly intervened. In the order given to the constable of the castle he describes the house as the king's hospital, and alleges that the prior or master had acted without the royal licence. The land had therefore been taken into the king's hand and the constable is to restore it to the brethren for the support of the hospital. No such alienation must again be made without the king's permission. No mention whatever is made of the bishop in the business. The letter comes from the royal household and is dated at Westminster, 27th December, 1244, seven hundred years ago.

And now after that lapse on the part of our convent we come to the next appropriation. Four score years have passed since "murder in the cathedral" rid Henry of Anjou of "this one upstart clerk," whom he found so troublesome. One of the four knights who did the archbishop to death was William de Tracy. Tradition has it that he built the parish church of Bovey Tracy in Devon as a penance for his crime and that it was therefore dedicated to St. Thomas of Canterbury. Whether the tradition is well-founded may be questioned, but an expiatory chapel to St. Thomas had been erected and it is possible that an altar with a similar intent had been placed in the church. In the year 1250, Richard Blund, Bishop of Exeter, conferred the advowson of the church on the master and brethren of our hospital and it remained with them till the dissolution. They had already received the tithes, possibly as far back as 1219, and we may therefore add Bovey Tracy to those churches whose revenues the convent of St. John's already enjoyed. The full ascription of the church is to SS. Peter and Paul and St. Thomas of

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Canterbury.

In three successive years of the eighties further valuable additions were made to the income of St. John's. The first of these was a gift from Robert de Boyton, a Cornish landowner. It consisted of two acres of his land in Lanteglos by Fowey with the advowson of the church there and that of a chapel dedicated to St. Saviour.

The second of these gifts came from nearer home. The Testard family were lords of the manor of Wembdon. It was William of this name who gave the living of St. George there with a messuage and an acre of land to the master and brethren in 1284.

Morwenstow in the north of Cornwall, is to-day associated in many people's minds with the name of Robert Stephen Hawker, who was vicar there in the middle of last century, author of the immortal verses "And shall Trelawny die!" The living was in the possession of William de Monkton, and in 1285 he alienated it to our hospital with an acre of land there. This was the third Cornish advowson to come into the possession of the master and brethren.

And here it may be suggested that if any parishioner of St. John's visiting Cornwall, finds himself at a loose end, he might with interest and satisfaction to himself make a pilgrimage to these three Cornish churches. They are all in the east end of the county; Morwenstow or Moorwinstow on the north coast, Lanteglos near Fowey in the south, and Davidstowe near Camelford. Bovey Tracy might also be visited on his way through Devon. The Somerset churches, Wembdon, Northover and Ile Brewers are near home and might be made the end of short pilgrimages on any summer day.

It may have been the increase in its income that enabled the convent to carry out a very necessary work long overdue. Sanitation in the middle ages and long afterwards left much to be desired. Yet even in the 13th century it was not wholly neglected. It would seem that the builders of the hospital had not thought the matter out sufficiently and had not planned well enough: there was need for amendment. For in the spring of 1286, a royal licence was issued on behalf of the master and brethren and "the poor Christians and sick there" who

were in need of running water, to allow a considerable work to be carried out. A channel was to be cut between the river "Pereith" and the hospital on the south side of "the great bridge" over the lands of others as well as that of the hospital. It was to be three feet in breadth, and of depth sufficient to meet the purpose of carrying the river water to the hospital. Thence it was to pass along the causeway on the north side, back to the river. In this way the hospital sewers would be continually flushed. The culvert was to be covered with stone and earth where necessary in order to maintain the level of the surface soil.

It will be remembered that earlier in the century there was some sort of link between our hospital and Woolavington, a pension which the monks of Goldcliff priory had paid to the master and brethren on behalf of that church. It now appears from an agreement dated 1285 between the hospital and Gilbert of Woolavington, rector of Huntspill, that the hospital maintained one of the three secular priests who served the chantries there.

It seems fairly certain that some sort of change in the original constitution of the house was bound to follow the successive acquisitions of property which had from time to time come to the convent. Other gifts than these had helped to swell its revenue, and the income was now considerably in excess of the expenditure. Something had to be done to make a proper use of this surplus, but whether the suggestion came spontaneously from the brethren themselves or whether it came from outside is not told. It may well have come from the bishop, for the document in which the proposals are embodied in detail, contains an undertaking on the part of the master and brethren to the bishop and concludes with a submissive agreement that if the convent fails to carry out the articles enunciated, the bishop shall step in and exercise his authority. There were three copies of this undertaking, one to be kept in the hospital and the others at Bath and Wells respectively. They were duly sealed on the 30th of July, 1298.

The master at this time was Geoffrey of Mark, the bishop was the saintly William of March. The covenant into which they entered enacted an increase in the number of the brethren and an extension of their duties. In

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the first place the number of secular clergy on the foundation was to be raised from seven to thirteen exclusive of the master. The number sacred in Christian history, that of "Christ and His Apostles twelve", was often adopted in such institutions. . Whether the accommodation in the building was already sufficient for this increase, or whether any extension was necessary, we do not know. The number was never again raised in the years that followed.

Hitherto the brethren had pursued two works of piety as their calling. They had their infirmary in which they tended the indigent sick, and the position of the house, built partly without the East Gate, was arranged to allow of their giving hospitality to pilgrims and wayfarers, even when they reached the town gate after it had been closed for the night. It will be remembered that yet another pious duty, that of educating the children of the poor, was often undertaken by hospitals. This it was decided should be one of the objects of devotion of the brethren of St. John's. Thirteen — again the sacred number — thirteen poor scholars were to be received within the hospital walls and to live there. Poverty was to be the first qualification and brains the second, for these boys were to be taught not merely reading and singing as in a song-school, but grammar, the basic subject in medieval education, the subject pre-eminent in the medieval grammar-school, an institution destined long to outlive the middle ages. All learning hinged on grammar and that meant Latin grammar. Grammar was the art of reading Latin correctly and of writing Latin correctly, so that the poets and prose-writers might be read and understood. Latin was the vehicle of learning and was read, written and spoken by all scholars throughout the western world.

It may be asked why should these boys, sons of impecunious parents, be taught Latin instead of the means of earning a living. That was the very end at which the authorities were aiming. These boys with brains were intended to become clerks, and either as parish priests or chantry chaplains or lawyers to find an establishment for themselves in the Church in its higher or lower orders. They would not follow their fathers on the land or in the workshop as their less gifted brothers would. We may here well recall that

Chaucer's parish priest and Chaucer's ploughman were brothers and it was the grammar-school that made that circumstance possible. If a boy whom the convent had chosen did not prove teachable, he could be turned out of the school and another put in his place.

The boys had their own scholars' table in the refectory and probably waited on the master and brethren before they served themselves. They were to be present in the chapel at the morning canonical hours, robed in their surplices, and the chanting must have gathered sweetness as well as volume from the addition of these young voices to the choir. Yet the attendance at chapel does not seem to have been too strictly enforced, for it was not to interfere with their going daily to the town school which apparently was not to lose these poor scholars altogether to the hospital. Thus they were able to benefit by training in two schools and what they learned in the one was supplemented by what they learned in the other. Beyond board and lodging the convent provided them with the means of buying clothing and books. Every year at Michaelmas they received an allowance of half a mark, or *6s. 8d.*, equivalent to eight pounds or more of our money. And so these boys of promise were cared for and educated until they were considered to be sufficiently instructed to proceed to Oxford or Paris, when they were discharged and their places filled by others.

But the admittance of six more brethren and the maintenance and equipment of these poor scholars did not place burdens on the house heavy enough to exhaust the increment of income which had flowed in during the last years. Something must yet be done and their thoughts turned towards that grammar-school which was already a town institution. We do not know where it was situated. We do not know how it was supported. We know that the rector or master would be a secular priest and in all likelihood a master of arts or of grammar, and that Latin grammar would be the chief subject which he taught. To this school then, the brethren turned to find another object of piety. They asked the rector to send seven — another sacred number — seven poor boys daily who should be fed free of cost in the hospital kitchen. Each of the seven was to receive as his portion a loaf of

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bread, a dish of porridge and a "pittance" — a term used in religious houses for an allowance of food. To wash down this more or less solid meal was given to each boy a gallon of "second" ale, or would it be fairer to the boys to suppose that the gallon was to be divided among them! The original Latin text seems to tell us of a quantity incredible to our modern ideas. However, the boys were allowed to take away any of the meal provided which remained over after their immediate wants had been satisfied, an arrangement which leaves room for hope.

Such then were the new works of piety to be wrought by the brethren of the hospital, and they were not only to be for the benefit of the members of "Christ's poor" directly affected, but also for the ease of the souls of those men and women who had provided the means by which these benefactions might be bestowed. Indeed was not this the primary object of the foundation, the benefit of their own souls? The daily mass was the first and supreme object, a duty that must never for any consideration be omitted. One brother might superintend the hospital, another the school, a third the reception of pilgrims, others might discharge the various duties of management—but the daily mass and the bidding prayer came before all else.

At the head of the list come the names of the king and queen and of the king's father and mother. His daughter, Joan of Acre and her husband Gilbert de Clare, the famous 'red earl' are there, and the king's cousin, Edmund, Earl of Cornwall. The founder's family is represented by William Mortimer and Hawis his wife, and by Millicent de Holland, if indeed this is the daughter of Eve and William de Cantilupe, in the name of her first husband. William de Monckton, who gave the hospital the church of Morwenstow is here, and Gilbert of Woolavington, the benefactor of Cleeve abbey. Henry of Thidolveshide, whose identity remains to be determined, stands high in the list. Among the ecclesiastics are the three bishops, Peter Quivil, bishop of Exeter, during whose episcopate licence was given to alienate Morwenstow and Lanteglos; Robert Burnel, the great lawyer who had occupied the See of Bath and Wells and was succeeded by William of March six years before this agreement, who also claims the prayers of the

house. The dean of Wells, William Burnel, Henry Husse, who was to succeed him four years later, and a predecessor in the same office whose name is not revealed to us. Here too are dom. Ralph of Williton, dom. W. of Hamelton, dom. H. Everard, master W. of Bath and master Anthony Bradney, who was later Bishop Drokensford's official. G. of Portland is described as brother of G., late master of the hospital, whom we may identify with a certain Gilbert, who presided over the hospital a few years earlier. Lady Joan Chambernon (Champernoun) may perhaps be connected with the parish of Charlynch. Lastly there are Hugh of Eton and William of Warminster. Of several of the benefactors the parents are also included by name in the bidding list.

There is an aspect of the finances of the house which from time to time causes a certain bewilderment. Every now and again there is a plea of poverty, and yet the convent seems to be able to lay hands on large sums of money whenever they are needed. A very striking example is to be found early after the turn of the century in the terms of a "final concord" with Matthew Furneaux completed in the king's court sitting at York. Sir Matthew was a Somerset magnate, serving as sheriff in 1305 and 1315, and a large owner of property. He owned a good deal of land in the neighbourhood, and it is not surprising that he should have had some sort of claim on the advowson of the church of Wembdon. It was too valuable a property to be allowed to slip lightly away, and the master and brethren evidently knew that Sir Matthew's pretension was too well founded and his position too strong to be disregarded. They were ready to come to terms if only the church were left in their hands and to pay pretty heavily. And pretty heavily they did pay, unless the terms were a fiction, for Sir Matthew's acknowledgement that the advowson rightfully belonged to the house they were to pay no less a sum than £100, or £2000 or more of our money.

In Bishop Drokensford's register of his episcopacy we are told of a visit which he paid to the hospital. The entry is dated July, 1304 and relates how the bishop confirmed the settlement of Wembdon vicarage made by his predecessor, Bishop William de March. The details of the arrangement are given and



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we are able to see the ties binding one of its churches to the convent. To the vicar, who was nominated by the brethren, was apportioned a manse with arable and meadow land. He also received oblations, legacies, fees from visitation of the sick, trentals — that is money given for a series of thirty masses to be sung for some one who had died — obits, "missals with requests," confessions, wax belonging to the church — probably that which remained of tapers and torches after a funeral — and the "small" tithes. When the brethren, as rectors, had made the vicar an allowance of grain from the "great" tithes, they took all the rest while finding two thirds of the expenses.

This was to the brethren the more pleasant side of hospital finance for it meant income. When it came to taxation it was another matter. We none of us like taxation, even when we remember that it is only a payment for good government and that we get an ample return for our money. But in the middle ages, when the bishop of Rome imposed taxes on this distant island, there seemed to be no return, and I doubt whether there was any. From his point of view it was justified, for he aspired to be the arbiter and supreme head of the kingdoms of western Christendom. Indeed in the days when our hospital was founded, his domination over kings and kingdoms was in no small degree established. And thus he was apt to lay a heavy hand on this country and the islanders revolted against the imposition and eventually threw it off.

Pope Clement V. died in 1314. He had succeeded in maintaining friendly relations with England and in continuing to inflict on the clergy a succession of taxes known as crusading tenths, so called because they were levied ostensibly for the redemption of the Holy Land. It was one of these that had been imposed on the master — now Henry of Stanford — and brethren, when the king intervened and came to their rescue. The bishops of London and Lincoln were the principal collectors of the tax and they received an order in May of this year instructing them to refrain from exacting it from the hospital, for the master and brethren had never contributed to any tenth granted to the king's progenitors or granted in any other wise because their means do not suffice for

their maintenance. This was followed a month later by a similar injunction to the acting treasurer and the barons of the exchequer.

This plea of poverty has already been before us. Whether it was actual or feigned may be doubted. In the very next year the hospital paid the large sum of 50 marks or £33 6s. 8d into the treasury to obtain a confirmation of their right to the livings of Wembdon, Lanteglos and Morwenstow. Thus what was saved from the Pope by the king's interference found its way into the king's treasury.

It is not improbable that it was in order to meet this heavy disbursement that the master incurred a debt of £40 about the same time. In the Close Rolls under the date of 13th March, 1315, we find a record of his having borrowed that sum from a clerk named John of Markyngfield. It is satisfactory to learn from a postscript that the debt was discharged.

In the course of the year 1318 another fine was paid into the king's treasury by the hospital. This time it is much smaller, but is an example of how money was raised by the exchequer. The master and brethren had erred in omitting to secure a royal licence before accepting a yearly payment of six shillings of rent in Ile Brewers from John de Mohun and a smaller one of threepence halfpenny from Richard of Beerhall in the same place. They had to obtain a pardon for this and succeeded in doing so, but at a cost of 40 shillings.

The house had now been established well over a hundred years and we have seen how the scope of its usefulness had been enlarged. Was the extended round of duties proving too much for the brethren, even though their numbers had been doubled? Or were they simply becoming supine and lax? Either way, there are complaints and it is urged against them, that they are no longer giving enough attention to the care of the wayfarer, one of the earliest objects of their Christian charity. The rumour came to the ears of the bishop — we have reached the year 1325 — and he took steps to learn whether there was any truth in it. We see him here as the bishop, the overseer, not only of the secular clergy, but of the regular also, the official whose business it was to see that the religious

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houses in his diocese were properly conducted each according to its own rule. He commissioned his official and a canon to make enquiry and to inspect all charters and especially impropriations, and to report on the facts when they had ascertained them. No doubt the instruction was carried out and if any shortcoming was proven against the brethren in respect of their hospitality to the wayfarer, it was amended.

This storm passed over the hospital in February. Three months later fell a bolt from the blue. Word ran round the cloister, the refectory and the master's parlour, that a messenger had arrived at the house carrying letters from the king sealed with the privy seal. What might this portend? What ever the business should prove to be, it had to be dealt with immediately, for the messenger had to take back an answer with him. We can picture the consternation at the extraordinary meeting in the chapter-house called to hear and consider the royal message which Brother Henry then and there laid before his brethren.

The missive concerned an old man who had long been in the service of the king and the king's father and who was now worn out with years of toil and no longer able to earn his living. The king needed a refuge for his servant's old age where he might end his days in peace and quietness. St. John's had been chosen as a fitting asylum. Accordingly the master and brethren were hereby required to admit the same John de la Sale to the benefits of a corody in their hospital.

A corody — the word is no longer in general use — might be described as the medieval equivalent of a modern purchased annuity. A man would hand over a sum of money or a piece of property to an abbey or priory, and then look to the convent so endowed, to supply him in return with food and clothing, a room and firing, or even with a horse, in his declining years. Among the drafts once belonging to a fifteenth century lawyer which have survived among our borough archives, is one which fully describes a corody, and which was doubtless his model whenever he was required to draw up such a legal agreement. The king does not seem here to have proposed any such exchange. He was accustomed to find asylums for worn-out chancery clerks, in

religious houses of royal foundation, and now he grounded his order for the admission of John de la Sale to the hospital on the supposition that all such houses in England had been founded by his progenitors. We noted earlier that Henry III writes of the house as his own hospital. So now Edward justified the step he was taking and directed the convent to maintain his old servant in food and clothing. He ordered also that they should draw up a list of the benefits John might look to receive in the hospital and send it by return sealed with their seal. Such detailed lists were quite usually found in agreements on corodies. Hospitals, the king adds, were intended for the care of the poor and weak, especially of those who had been in the king's service, and John was wholly incapable of working any longer.

"What shall we do?" we may hear brother Henry asking. And in reply, one of the brethren, more astute than the rest, surely pointed to the clause in the king's letter which left open for them a way of escape. "So far," it ran, "as the goods of the hospital suffice for those dwelling there and for him." Their goods sufficed for them only, added the brother. Let them plead poverty.

Of course this reply is purely conjectural, but it is in accord with the convent's usual method of dealing with such a dilemma, and I have an impression that poor John found a home elsewhere than at Bridgwater, and that the master and brethren breathed again — for a time.

Most of my readers are well aware that the incumbency of St. Mary's carries with it that of Chilton Trinity. But not all know how that union came about. We now reach the beginning of the story, so long ago as 1327.

Why the brethren of St. John's did not take the trouble to obtain a licence to receive property in mortmain I cannot explain, but in this year they paid a fine of five marks or £3 6s. 8d for having acquired the advowson of Chilton Trinity Church with the chapels of Idstock and Hunstile without a licence. These three livings were the property of the family of Wiggebere or Wigborough, founded by one John, an official of the Conqueror's court. He had been rewarded by his lord with the manor of Wigborough near to South Petherton, and his descendants still held their lands of the king by the service of usher of his

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hall. Sir William had died three years before, and his brother, Sir Richard, who had succeeded him had not long survived him and now the church and the chantries had been granted or bequeathed to the hospital. Hunstile chapel has disappeared but the ruin of Idstoke is still to be seen.

This latest gift to the convent led the master and brethren to carry out an act of reciprocity due to the memory of the Wigborough family. A deed, dated from the chapter-house in June, 1333, was drawn up and its text may be read in Bishop Ralph's register. By this deed the master and brethren undertook to found a chantry to the memory of these benefactors in the parish church of Wembdon. The chantry priest was to celebrate on behalf of the souls of Sir Richard of Wigborough and his wife, his father and mother, and his brother Sir William. The king and queen, the bishop, the archdeacon of Taunton, and Anthony of Bradney, formerly canon of Wells, were also to be had in perpetual remembrance at the altar. The rights and appurtenances of the chantry were to consist of all things necessary to the altar, and a message in Wembdon called Cotelouessitte. Besides the rights, they set apart an annual salary of £3 1s. 8d. for the chantry priest who was to be at liberty to distrain on their lands in Wembdon and Durleigh if his stipend fell into arrear. There was also to be a forfeit of 40 shillings to the fabric of the church of Wells "as often as we shall be deficient." The witnesses are county magnates of the district bearing well-known names — Columbers, Malet, Stawell, Forneaux, Popham, Horsy, Bradney, Michell and Coker.

The following year saw a change in the mastership of the hospital. The bishop deputed his official to see that the recent election of John of Walsham had been duly carried out in accordance with custom. The name suggests that he, or at least his family, came from Norfolk. We might also presume that his predecessor, Henry of Stanford, was of Lincolnshire origin. Of the twelve names of masters that have come down to us, all but the last two are names of places, and of these seven belong to Somerset. The fact points to a good number of the brethren being of local origin. But it does not help at all to determine the class from which they came. We should

like to know something under that head, but at present at least must remain ignorant.

It was about the middle of January in the fateful and memorable year of 1348, the year when the Black Death came to Somerset, that the bishop approved the election of Thomas Cadecote, or Catcott, to the mastership. How the vacancy occurred we are not told, but we may presume that the new master directly succeeded John of Washam. Thomas held the position for many years and was still holding it when the insurrection of 1381 began. Thus his tenure began and ended in trouble ; it began in plague and ended in tumult.

We have no evidence to show us how the two religious houses fared through those dark days. We only know that the master of the hospital lived through them. But towards the close of 1349, when the plague had almost, if not altogether, died out in Bridgwater, a licence was issued, allowing the hospital to acquire considerable properties in the town, as well as in North Petherton and Chedzoy, from four named donors whom we may regard as the executors of the will of some testator and benefactor unknown.

In the following summer the convent received further help, for the bishop granted twenty days of release from penance that had been imposed on them to those who with contrition visited St. John's or extended the hand of charity toward the house and the maintenance of the needy who were being tended there.

In the spring of 1357 we are reminded of that pension which was found to be due in the early 13th century from the church of Woolavington to the hospital. Goldcliff, as an alien priory, had with the rest been dissolved, and now an enquiry on the subject was ordered to be held at Bridgwater. "Walter, long since prior of Goldeclyve," runs the writ, "and the convent there granted to the master and brethren of the hospital of St. John, Bridgwater, a yearly pension of four marks from the church of Woolavington. The escheator warned William de Sancto Vedasto, the king's farmer of the possessions of the priory ... to be present at the taking of this inquisition, but he did not come or send anybody in his name." And that is all we learn about the business.

We now come to the most exciting

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episode in our story — Bridgwater's share in the insurrection of 1381. It might be well for the better understanding of this narrative if the reader were to refresh his memory of the general tumult by reading some good account of it. The best and fullest of which I know is Andre Reveille's *Le Soulèvement des Travailleurs d'Angleterre en 1381*, a fine treatise, well documented. But it is not within everyone's reach ; it is in French, and the documents are in the original Latin. Professor Oman's *The Great Revolt of 1381* gives a shorter though fairly full account. But apart from the detail which these works give, the reader cannot do better than enjoy once more the section on "The Peasants' Revolt" in J. R. Green's classic *Short History of England*, where the story is told with all his brilliant vividness. Some years ago I wrote as fully as the documentary evidence allowed on the Bridgwater events (*Somersetshire Archæological and Natural History Society ; Proceedings during the year 1927*, volume lxxiii, pp. 57-69). I ventured there to differ from Professor Oman in so far as he expressed the view that the Bridgwater episode had little to do with the general rising and was to be regarded as apart from it. My paper is therefore somewhat controversial, as I put forward in it the facts which seem to me to show that Bridgwater had a real share in the general rising. Whichever of the three authorities mentioned above the reader may elect to consult, I strongly suggest that he should make a comparison between what happened in St. Alban's and what happened in Bridgwater. There it was Town against Abbey, here it was Town against Hospital. Each town was in arms against a powerful religious house.

We do not know what the income of the hospital was in those critical years, nor shall we be able to compare its financial status with that of the other religious houses of Somerset until the end came upon them all. But we have witnessed how, year after year, decade after decade, the brethren had been adding tenement to tenement, field to field, church to church, until they might well be described as among the rich. And it was this wealth which was the foundation underlying their unpopularity. "True love," ran one of John Ball's rhymes which were being passed from one to another across the whole country at that time — " True love is away that was so

good, and clerks for wealth work them woe. God do bote, for now is tyme." Nor was it entirely a question between the "haves" and the "have-nots." Burgesses, men of the middle class, were prominent in these demonstrations and are indicted by name. Ingleby, the chief, was no peasant or labourer, and we shall find in the terms that he dictated to the master that the townsmen, as in St. Alban's, were suffering under the wealth and domination of a religious house.

We hear the first loud gusts of the coming storm in 1380. Probably it had been muttering long before that. Thomas of Catcott had now been master for more than thirty years and was probably an old man. On February 6th, a commission was appointed to enquire into the complaint which he made against certain men of the town and neighbourhood. He alleged that they had come armed to the hospital, had broken doors and windows of his church, had taken goods and £20 in money, had closed and still held closed the doors against ministers and parishioners, had assaulted his servants, and by threats had kept them from approaching the hospital.

Such scenes of violence and coercion seem to have proved too much for the aged master. Either he died or he resigned his office, and in the middle of April we find his successor William Cammel successfully appealing for protection for himself, the brethren, their servants, the hospital itself, and all its possessions on the ground that the difficulties that had arisen between his predecessor and the commonalty had not been satisfactorily met, and the hospital and its personnel were in constant jeopardy.

Three months later two further legal commissions were appointed to examine complaints showing that Cammel's apprehensions had been fully justified. In both these, persons are by name accused of having perpetrated much the same kind of excesses as those which Thomas had specified. But there is now an important addition. They had taken not only the master's goods, but certain papal bulls touching the appropriation of the vicarage.

In the following spring Nicholas Frompton or Frampton, the vicar of Bridgwater, comes upon the scene. It has been suggested that he was a provisor to whom the pope had given the vicarage, and it

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has been denied on insufficient grounds that he ever was vicar. Apparently he had been outlawed, possibly for not answering to a summons, and the escheator in Somerset, who had seized the spiritualities as well as the temporalities of the vicarage, was on April 10th directed to meddle no further with the spiritualities, while keeping the temporalities in his hand until further order.

To sum up the position of affairs in the borough at the end of May. We seem to have two parties, a clerical and an anti-clerical. On the one side are ranged the master and brethren of the hospital with their lawyers and servants and some sympathizers among the burgesses. On the other side — and I have not here recorded the evidence — we find a number of burgesses including some of the most prominent in the borough, at the bottom of whose discontent may have been bonds held by the master ; the provisor vicar, who is regarded by the hospital as a rank outsider and intruder ; a lord of the town, whose rights have been infringed ; the lord of a neighbouring manor, whose interest in the matter is outside our knowledge, and certain men living in hamlets outside the borough, who may have been tenants of the hospital.

Thus we reach June, the month which was to witness the terrible risings in Kent and Essex. The complex of unrest which had been underlying the life of the people since the grim days of the Black Death, now broke out in sporadic rioting, east, north and west. The main story is well known, but for us there are two occurrences to be borne in mind while we read the Bridgwater story. It was on Saturday the 15th of June, that the culmination in London was reached and Wat Tyler slain at Smithfield. On the same day the revolt of the burgesses of St. Alban's against the abbot had been at its worst, but had died out on the Sunday.

On the following Wednesday, June the 19th, Bridgwater was the scene of an outbreak very similar to that which had taken place in St. Alban's. Once more the hospital was the objective of the insurgents. The names of those taking part in the attack are unknown to us with the exception of Thomas Ingleby, the leader of the mob, with whom is associated Adam Brugge "with others". Nicholas Frompton's name is mentioned in such a way that we may suppose him to have

been present, but not certainly, for an order for his arrest was given in London the very next day.

The chief open space within the town limits was the Cornhill, on one side of which frowned the ramparts of the castle, while fish-and flesh-shambles lay on the west, and the east stile of the church on the south-west. Here we may picture the crowd of angry burgesses grouped on that warm summer morning about the picturesque market-cross, from the steps of which Ingleby was haranguing them, adding fuel to the fire of their passions, and stirring them to further violence. Possibly the vicar was also there, using the language of the Hebrew prophets and the curses of psalmists to drive his hearers to the deeds which followed.

Then the crowd stirred and a movement began toward the East Gate of the town. With a rudely coloured banner displaying the royal arms and spreading in the breeze, the mob passed excitedly down the street skirting the castle moat, streamed over the narrow bridge spanning the river and noisily approached through Eastover the doors of the hated hospital. Here having gained admission their leaders recited their demands. The numbers and armed strength of his enemies were such that it was impossible for William Cammel to do anything but yield to their threats of arson and personal violence. First, he handed over to Ingleby the bonds he held against the men of the town, binding them to certain conditions which have not come down to us. Next he released to Nicholas Frompton all rights and profits as rector of the church except corn in sheaf and hay. This reservation of the great tithes that Nicholas now received and these were of course due to him, if he was the recognized vicar. Lastly, in order to maintain his personal freedom and to save his own life and the lives of the brethren, the master paid Ingleby a fine of 200 marks, or £133 6s. 8d. These acts of capitulation seem to have satisfied the insurgents and they turned their unpleasant attentions from the hospital, which here passes out of the story of the rioting.

The rest of the day was spent by the mob in burning parchments, firing certain houses and in bloody vengeance on the victims of their wrath. In the evening, the fires were still

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smouldering and two heads were to be seen impaled above the parapet of the town bridge.

This, so far as we know, was the end of the insurrection in Bridgwater. Throughout the country authority was quickly restored and while some at least of the rioters suffered grievous punishment, the government exercised a wise clemency which bore good fruit. But how fared Bridgwater and the chief actors in these scenes ?

On the following Sunday the borough was proclaimed in company with Hull, Beverley, Scarborough and Newcastle-on-Tyne, and when the policy of a general amnesty was declared, parliament excepted the inhabitants of Canterbury, Cambridge, Bridgwater, Bury, Beverley and Scarborough. Later this system of general punishment was renounced and Bridgwater at length regained her freedom.

Frompton, who had been outlawed, was pardoned his outlawry on surrendering at the Marshalsea prison in London in the following February, and the day after received a pardon for all crimes committed during the insurrection. In this document he is described as vicar of the church of Bridgwater, and he held that office at least up to July, 1383, when his name appears as "perpetual vicar" in a Bridgwater will. Ingleby also was pardoned and seems to have settled down to a peaceful life in the borough where he dwelt in a house by the church.

So far as our resources help us, peace settles down for many years on the house by the East Gate, for the bishops' registers for the rest of the 14th century are missing, and those of the earlier part of the 15th have little to tell us. William Cammel did not hold the mastership for long. In 1385 a licence was granted to elect a successor. This was probably William Patshulle, whom we find, in company with his brethren and the vicar, making a special grant toward the income of the chaplain of Our Lady's chantry in 1393.

When on an earlier page I suggested that pilgrimages might be made to the various churches held by the hospital, I omitted St. Mary's as already familiar to Bridgwater readers. But here let me add it to the list of shrines, if only for the sake of a relic of the hospital not generally noticed by visitors to the church. A pair of binoculars may be

needed for it may be found to be beyond the vision of the unaided eye. A few years ago, Dr. Eeles, when examining the bosses of the chancel roof, found inscribed on one of them on the south side, the words "Frater Wills Patehull" (Brother William Patehull, master) with the emblem of the *Agnus Dei*. It will be remembered that in the design of the convent's seal, St. John the Baptist Holds the *Agnus Dei* on a roundel.

Concerning the names of the masters in the earlier half of the 15th century there has been some misunderstanding and confusion. After further research and, careful comparison of the sources I have arrived at the following list as trustworthy :—

1385 (?) Wm. Pathull. Master in 1393. Died 1416

1415 John Wemedon.

1422 John Pathull

1423 Thomas Pulton.

1449 Roger Cory.

We may note here that the licence to elect a new master, dated from Westminster in 1423, styles the brethren Augustinian, and on two or three occasions from now onwards they were so qualified, though not by themselves.

From our own archives during these years we learn of bequests made to the hospital by pious donors and of the yearly gift of wine made by the town on Corpus Christi day, a compliment which was maintained until the end.

We have from time to time related that a new master had been elected to fill the vacant chair, but nothing has been said of the manner in which the choice was made. We have now an opportunity of witnessing an election by scrutiny in all its details.

When Roger Cory, being full of years, decided to retire from the mastership, there was a division among the brethren on the choice of his successor. Licence to elect had been obtained from the patrons who represented the lines of Maud Mortimer and Eve Cantilupe, the great-great-grand-daughters of the founder. These were Richard, Duke of York, representing the Mortimers, and William, Lord la Zouche and Seymour, representing the Cantilupes. These licences were dated in the middle of March in the year 1457, and on the 28th of the same month the chapter met under the presidency

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of John Holford. Eight other brethren were present and three were absent ; the house therefore had not its full complement at the time. The president with the assent of the other brethren present fixed that day week, the 4th of April, as the date of the election. He peremptorily admonished them that they should be in their places on the Monday of the election. The three absentees, who are described not only as absent but as apostate, were to be publicly cited to attend, as well, as all others having a voice in the election.

The morning arrived, the nine brethren were present but the recalcitrant three were still absent. Possibly they had renounced the cloister and were far beyond the sound of the summons. Before coming to the business of the day, the convent assembled in the choir and there in accordance with custom celebrated the mass of the Holy Ghost. Then in formal chapter they took their places in the chapterhouse where a sermon was preached in Latin and they sang the hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*.

Roger Cory, the old master, presided. He had been master since 1449 only, but he was now elderly and had resigned the office. With him in chapter sat William Rodewel, one of the oldest of the brethren, Edward Chauntrell who had been ordained priest ten years before, and John Holford, candidate for the mastership. The other brethren present were John Croyel, Roger Parys, who had been ordained sub-deacon in 1448, but does not seem to have taken higher orders, Ellis Bertram, priest of four years standing and eventually master of the hospital, and John Gyles and John Wemdon, who had become priests less than a year before. The three absentees were Walter Norman, priest in 1450, John Spencer, priest in 1153, and John Bevice.

On occasions such as this it was important that the law of the Church should be fully represented. The famous Hugh Sugar, whose chapel you may still see in the nave of Wells Cathedral, was invited by the brethren to act as their counsellor and director ; John Touker, notary public, as their scribe, and five other law men as witnesses of the proceedings. The three absentees were then publicly summoned at the door of the chapter-house and in the choir of the church, and when there was no response, the

president declared them to be contumacious and decreed that the election should proceed without them. The licences to elect were read and the president called upon all persons who had been excommunicated, suspended and interdicted and any others who ought not to be present to withdraw. It was the duty of Hugh Sugar to read the constitution *Quia propter* and this he now did, declaring the forms of election which it set forth.

If a house decided not to hold an election themselves they could delegate the power to some one else. This step had been taken by the monks of Bath ten years before when they requested the bishop to choose a prior for them. But otherwise there were three ways of proceeding, which had been laid down in the days of Innocent III, the great administrator. The choice might be made by inspiration. Only nine years previously the priory of Bruton had lost their prior, and the sub-prior and convent had reached the same point in choosing a successor to which the brethren of Bridgwater had now come, when without any discussion as to the person to be elected they there and then, by divine grace from above and the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, as they firmly believe, unanimously and with one voice assumed and elected a fellow-canon, a man well qualified by birth, age, orders, character and learning to be their prior. A second method, suitable where there was disagreement, was to proceed by compromise and form a committee representing the opposing parties who should choose a new head. The third method was by scrutiny, and this method the chapter after deliberation decided to pursue.

They chose three from among themselves to act as scrutineers.

The three received power to ascertain secretly, though in the presence of a notary and witnesses, first their own votes and then those of their brethren. After they had carried out the ballot it was ordained that Edward Chauntrell in the name of himself, his fellow-scrutineers and the whole convent, should elect as master that brother who received a majority of votes.

There were two candidates in the minds of the brethren — Thomas Ile and John Holford, for we can neglect the name of the late master for whom Holford cast his vote, probably to avoid helping his rival.

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Thomas had at one time been a brother of the house and had been ordained priest in 1422. But in 1445, when the hospital at Wells had but two brethren, the bishop had himself chosen the Bridgwater brother to be their master. Some of his former house now wished to bring him back.

The vote was taken as has just been stated, old John Cory received one vote. Thomas Ile had the support of Croyel, Parys and Bertram the future master, while Cory, Rodewel, Chauntrell and the younger men, Gyles and Wemdon, cast their votes for Holford.

After the votes had been committed to writing, Edward Chauntrell read them to the chapter, alleging, for he bore in mind Pope Innocent's direction, that John Holford's election was secured not only by the larger, but also by the sounder part of the convent, for, said he, Cory and Rodewel were the eldest of the brethren, the former had been master, and all five of Holford's supporters were far more zealous for the good of the house than the three who had voted for Thomas Ile.

John Wemdon was appointed to announce the result to clergy and people in the vulgar tongue, and John Gyles was directed as proctor of the chapter to obtain the consent of the master-elect. Then chanting the *Te Deum* they bore him to the high altar.

Eight days later, the bishop in his chapel at Woky manor received the master-elect. After the legal forms regarding the election had been presented it was duly confirmed, and letters to the archdeacon of Taunton for his induction and installation, and to the president and convent of the hospital for obedience to be rendered to him were given

The monastic system is one of the greatest and most influential of the medieval institutions, yet it had many and deep blemishes. It embraced saints of the pattern of St. Benedict and sinners like Roger Norreys, the notorious abbot of Evesham. The light of historical scrutiny has been turned persistently on the conduct of our English houses with the result that the great Abbeys such as Glastonbury, have emerged in good order, while in the smaller houses offences have been found all too frequently. Amongst these delinquents at this period of its history our hospital must be numbered. The spiritual

condition of the members of the convent was far below the lofty ideal of their vocation.

They were neither industrious, nor studious, nor pious. This is not the mere gossip of the market place and the churchyard. We learn it from Bishop Bekyngton himself, who has left on record in his register the list of injunctions which he sent to the convent by the hands of his chancellor, that strong disciplinarian, Hugh Sugar, in his endeavour to keep them from the evil ways into which they had fallen.

He points out the suspicious circumstances suggesting moral laxity in which the brethren carry out a part of their domestic routine and insists that these circumstances shall cease. The master himself appears to be tarred with the same brush, and he is placed under correction with even more particularity. The remaining injunctions with the penalties for infringement I give in full :—

“ All the brethren are to attend in the choir at times of divine service day or night, and not to absent themselves without special licence of the master on account of infirmity or for some other reasonable cause, under penalty of having 1*d.* deducted from their yearly pension on every occasion.”

“ All the brethren, unless excused by the master, are immediately after compline to repair to their dormitory and remain there in silence until matins, under penalty of abstinence on bread and water on the following Friday”

“ The brethren are not in future to be allowed to be idle, but each of them is to be put by the master to some good and virtuous work, according to his capacity and disposition at such times as he is not engaged in divine offices.”

“ The brethren are at all times and places to show due reverence to the master and their seniors and not to use insulting, opprobrious, scandalous, or dishonourable language against the master or any of their fellows, under penalty of observing silence and keeping to the cloister for a fortnight.”

“ The brethren are not henceforth to swear by the limbs of Christ or play publicly at ball with lay persons, under penalty of fasting on bread and water on the following Friday.”

“ No brother to go outside the bounds of the hospital, even into the street called



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Eastover or the town of Bridgwater, or the garden called the uttergardeyn (outer garden) without licence of the master, under penalty of keeping to the cloister for a month."

" The master is to cause the two doors giving entry to the chapel of St. Mary the Virgin of the said hospital from the street adjoining the said chapel, commonly called utterdorys (outer doors), to be kept shut every day from immediately after high mass until the hour of vespers, and from immediately after vespers until the hour of the first mass celebrated in the chapel, under the penalty of disobedience and contempt,'

" The master is to cause the path adjoining the churchyard of the hospital, whereby free exit is given now-a-days from the said churchyard to the outer court and east gate of the hospital, to be closed and walled up before the Assumption next, under the same penalty."

" The master is to cause the stone wall adjoining the hall and parlour of the hospital and enclosing the fishpond on its south side to be made straighter and higher, and the door now existing therein to be closed and walled up, before the Nativity of the Virgin Mary next, as was lately enjoined on him by Master Hugh Sugar, doctor of laws, the bishop's chancellor, under penalty of suspension from the administration of the spiritualities and temporalities of the hospital."

" No brother is to reveal the counsels or secrets of chapter without just, reasonable and lawful cause approved by the bishop, under penalty of observing silence and keeping to the cloister, the dormitory and the refectory for a month."

" The master is to make before Michaelmas next, a cob wall of a suitable height enclosing the east side of the fishpond and extending from the aforesaid stone wall as far as the wall of the churchyard of the hospital, under penalty of 10 shillings to be distributed among the poor inhabitants of Bridgwater.'

" The master is to cause a dungeon, or prison, to be made before Michaelmas next in the place lately appointed by the aforesaid Master Hugh, with suitable stocks and fetters, for the correction of the brethren, under the same penalty.'

" The master is to produce to the bishop before Midsummer, 1464, an inventory of the state of the hospital and the jewels and other silver things thereof, with a description of the latter and a statement of their weight, under the penalty of disobedience and contempt."

' The master is once a year at least to render an account of the receipts and expenses of the hospital before his convent or certain brethren appointed by the convent to represent them, under penalty of 20 shillings to be levied from him and applied to the fabric of Wells cathedral."

" The master is to deal with difficult and important matters in the chapter-house, and to act in accordance with the advice of his convent when it seems expedient so to do, under the penalty of disobedience and contempt."

" The master is before Michaelmas next to cause the common seal and the more important evidences of the convent, to be deposited in a chest with three locks and three keys, whereof one is to be kept in the custody of the master and the others in the custody of two brethren, to be appointed by the convent, under the same penalty."

" The master is to cause these injunctions to be read aloud once & month at least to all the brethren assembled in chapter, and to have them observed so far as he can, under the same penalty."

These are dated from Wells palace, 1st July, 1463.

Two points in them seem to call for comment. It will be noted that the chancellor had previously visited the hospital and had examined into the derelictions of the convent. At that time he had prescribed alterations in the wall next to the hall and parlour and had selected a site for the dungeon which was to be erected. I incline to think that in reality the whole of the injunctions emanated from him. The hand was the hand of the bishop, but the voice was the voice of the chancellor. A great disciplinarian was Master Sugar.

A second criticism regards the method of correction employed here, it seems easy to devise rules and inhibitions and structural alterations, but who is to carry them out? An evil thing had entered into the body communal, and the surgeon, instead of cutting it out and cleaning the wound, sewed

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it up. The authority that is to carry out the discipline and the chastisement is the master in counsel with the brethren — the very men who are the culprits.

From this time, however, we hear nothing more of short-comings such as these, and we may hope that the bishop's interposition worked successfully.

It was in this year that Bridgwater had its Lourdes. It had come to the ears of the bishop that things were happening at Wembdon which it were better should be looked into. He had heard that folk were flocking thither, drawn by the rumour of cures wrought at a well in that parish, known as St. John's spring. He had heard even more specifically from the master of the hospital to the same effect. There had been a great concourse of people who came thirsting for the water and in fact drinking it. Moreover they were making offerings there in honour of Our Lady and St. John the Baptist, and in such gifts the brethren of the hospital, or at any rate their vicar at Wembdon, were quite probably more or less interested. Many sufferers to whom for many years physicians had been in vain claimed here to have been restored to health and made their offerings at the spring. Now the bishop was a wise man and declined to be hurried into acquiescence in these cures. He had described the waters of Bath as a heavenly gift, but they had been known for many years to have healing properties. This Wembdon claim was quite new, at least to the bishop, and the matter must be looked into. To this end he directed two of his officials, both men learned in the civil and canon law, to investigate the verity of the alleged cures and to acquaint him with the result of their enquiries.

John Holford retained his office for a good many years after the unpleasant business of the bishop's injunctions. Towards the end of his term, which came in 1483, he and the brethren received from John Kendale a yearly rent of £10. This is of interest to us because tradition says that John Kendale was our first mayor, and it is not long since the Council named a new road after him. What seems to be a sequel to this gift is an undertaking of the master and brethren to pay an annual rent of £10 issuing from their manor of Durligh — another church for our pilgrims! — to Nicholas Selwode of Chard,

and one of £5 to his wife, should she survive him. It is from Nicholas Selwode's receipts for the quarterly payments, that we gather that Holford was succeeded in 1483 by Elys Bertram.

By September, 1490, Thomas Spenser had become master. Among our archives there survives the draft of a licence from him drawn up in favour of one of his brethren named Henry Courtes, permitting him to visit the Holy Land and the seat of the apostles, and to study at Oxford and Cambridge.

We have now the opportunity of attending another election to the mastership. Little did the brethren know that it was to be the last. Thomas Spencer died on December 4th, 1524, having served in the office for about a quarter of a century. A meeting of the convent was held in the chapter-house on the 22nd of the same month, over which Robert Walshe presided. I give the names of the other brethren present in order that they may be compared with the list of those who survived the dissolution of the house. They are William Helyer, John Barcombe, Robert Barnard, Henry Pety, Thomas Kegine, Richard Kemeryge and John Golde. The proceedings were adjourned till the 3rd of January. In the interval the licences to elect were received from the patrons — Queen Elizabeth of York, representing the Mortimer branch, and Henry Daubeney, afterwards created Earl of Bridgwater, to whom the lordship of Lord la Zouche, representing the Cantilupe branch, had been assigned on his attainder. Then on the 3rd of January, after singing the mass of the Holy Spirit in the choir, the brethren were summoned to the chapter-house by the ringing of the chapter-bell. There they sang the hymn *Veni Creator*, and the constitution *Quia propter* was duly read. They then unanimously elected Robert Walshe to be master or prior of their house or hospital. This suggests a choice by inspiration, though the word is not used. Singing a *Te Deum*, they bore him to the high altar, and announced the result of the election to clergy and people summoned to the church by the ringing of the bells. The new master received final confirmation from the bishop three days later.

In the year following, under the same

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bishop John Clerke, a most acceptable dispensation was made to the convent. Both young and old had suffered severely in the cold atmosphere of the church at the night services and these the brethren were now allowed to discontinue.

A further amelioration was enjoyed in the advance of the hour of the first mass of the day from 5 a.m. to 6 a.m. throughout the six months of winter. These changes after 300 years of fortitude suggest a softening either in the physique of the brethren or possibly in the episcopal heart.

The long life of the hospital was now drawing to a close and it only remains to describe the end.

It was the hospitable custom of Bridgwater folk to bestow a gift of wine on any person of note passing through or visiting the town. Such gifts were made at the public expense. Somewhere about 1536 — the exact date is not given — there is an entry in the town accounts of an expenditure of 10*d.*, for a pottle of sack and a pottle of claret wine given to the "vyseters" These were two or perhaps three of the visitors appointed by Thomas Cromwell acting for the king, to visit the religious houses and to enquire into the extent of their properties, the moral conduct of their convents, and matters termed superstitious, such as the possession of relics. The names of the visitors who announced the submission of St. John's to the royal supremacy were John Tregonwell, William Petre and John Smyth.

As a result of their visit to Bridgwater they report no charges of superstition, but

"have founde as muche conformyttes as myght be desyred."

It had been decreed that the smaller houses, those having an income of less than £200, should be the first to go. There were in Somerset a dozen such, of which Cleve Abbey, with an income of £155 9*s.* 5*d.*, was the richest, while Bridgwater hospital stood second with an income of £120 19*s.* 1*d.* To arrive at the present value of any sum of money mentioned to the end of our story, the reader should multiply by at least twenty. The incomes of the other Somerset hospitals, those of Wells and Bath, come far below that of Bridgwater. Now that we at last learn the income of our house, it is clear that it has

been no exaggeration to call it wealthy.

The compensatory annuities granted to the master and brethren cannot be regarded as meagre or insufficient. Of those who met in chapter for the election of the master in 1525, we shall miss five in the list of annuitants. The survivors of the suppression are the master, Robert Walshe, who is awarded the annual life pension of £33 6*s.* 8*d.*, to be paid half yearly from Lady Day, 1539, onward; Thomas Coggyn, Richard Kymrydge, John Golde, John Wyll, Robert Fysshier, £4 each; John Woode, John Mors, £2 each — in all, £57 6*s.* 8*d.*, or nearly half the income of the house.

In Cardinal Pole's pension list compiled some years later, we find some changes under the head of the late priory at Bridgwater. Walshe has disappeared. Kymridge alias Gribbell, Fysshier, Mors, Woode and Wille, still receive the same sums as above. But the names of some laymen are added. William Portman and Alexander Popham, 20 shillings each, William Michell, 32 shillings, John Master, £4, John Cuffe, junior, auditor, 20 shillings and Sir Hugh Paulet, as steward of the chapter, 40 shilling.

At last we learn the extent of the hospital property in the town itself. There are 69 tenements in the list with the tenants' names, and the total rental is more than £21. It appears also that they had some property in the city of London, in the parish of St. John the Baptist, in Fleet Street.

But dispersion and dissolution are the notes on which our story ends. The convent is dissolved, their properties are dispersed, their buildings are scattered.

"My lord of Synt Jonys" might have become "My lord bishop of Bridgwater," had the king's plan of making a bishopric of Bridgwater matured, for Dr. Powell tells us that his name was put forward for the episcopal honour. But we hear nothing more of Robert Walshe. It may be that some of the brothers were able to secure benefices in some other parts of the country. But they ceased to exist as a community.

The properties from far west to far east have fallen into the king's hands and are dispersed among many tenants and owners by his disposition.

The buildings are dismantled and their fixtures and fittings scattered in all directions.

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One entry in the town accounts tells us of a bell being weighed for the Visitors. Others of the bells of St. John's were sent to Charlinch. I have tried more than once to trace them in that church but without success. Another entry concerns the taking down of the glass of the "farmery" or infirmary, and yet another runs "Payd for the farmery, xxs." So the glory passes.

When you make your pilgrimages to their churches, even when you pass by that stone tracery not so very far from the doors of your parish church, be mindful of these brethren, forget their negligences and offences and remember the many deeds of pity and compassion which they wrought on behalf of "Christ's poor."

### SOURCES

Bishops' Registers in various volumes published by the Somerset Record Society.

*Victoria History of Somerset* for description of seal.

*Bridgwater Borough Archives* (Somerset Record Society.),

W. A. J. Archbold ; *Somerset Religious Houses*, for the dissolution.

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