

CHAPTER XV11

BEAULIEU ABBEY

IN these days of what, echoing the multitude, we will call enlightenment, it is a deeply interesting labour to trace back to its youth the venerable structure which now meets our gaze as a ruin, or as a prized relic of antiquity, by pious hands preserved. Attentively regarding the motives which in many cases suggested the ecclesiastical establishments scattered here and there over the face of England, and remembering also the blind reverence in which they were held, no thought so spontaneously arises as that the times are indeed changed, and we ourselves with them. I am not venturing any extreme opinion as to what, in us and in the times, is changed for the better or for worse. If in the days of ignorant credulity and zealotry some things were to be deprecated, in the modern time some things also might be found perhaps, which neither you, kind reader, nor I would like to say should be admired. To me it seems becoming every day more difficult to keep up a strong faith as to the course which the world is just now taking and the progress, which enthusiasts delight so much to celebrate, appears sometimes to my eye (which may certainly be getting dim) to move with a sidling gait, as often crab-like as straightforward. Sooner or later there seems to occur in everything a reaction. Nature herself doesn't go perpetually forward, but *doubles*, is not always creating, but sometimes reproducing and falls back not seldom upon olden fashions - not worn out but only laid aside for awhile. What now, if the old phase should gather again over human society, if night should follow day in the intellectual as in the natural world. If, in short, we go back from thinking at random to thinking under restraint, from a proud defiance of spiritual discipline to a contrite submission to its behests. And behold a future monarch, in a repentant mood, apply to reverend dignitaries for advice as to the best means of propitiating the Deity for his misdeeds and read, as the result of his application, that the first stone of a convent will be laid by the sinning sovereign on a certain day, the king being moved to rear this edifice as a memorial of his penitence and to expiate his offences.

From some such motive and under such priestly guidance, legends ascribe the erection of Beaulieu Abbey and whoever were the advisers of humbled majesty, they displayed unquestionable judgment in the selection of a site for the contemplated structure. The New Forest had been more than a century in existence and possessed, in its herds of deer, the raw material for venison pasties and other enrichments of the *cuisine* and the refectory. Then the locality was rich in its picturesque scenery. The winding river with its beautiful banks and woods which clothe luxuriantly the hillside till it slopes down to the tide, excepting where interspersed by green pastures, this must have afforded a desirable water access to the Abbey. Admirable discrimination was thus manifested by the "wise master-builders" who consecrated this charming and desirable spot for the purposes of an institution of this nature and design.

The legendary accounts of the funding of Beaulieu Abbey are interesting inasmuch as they depict some of the features of the age in which it had its origin.



Gatehouse, Beaulieu

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It is stated that the motive which influenced King John, its founder, was that he might thereby confer favour upon the brethren of the Cistercian order, to whom he had formerly been opposed. The appointment of Stephen Langton to the See of Canterbury by pope Innocent, incensed John to such a degree, that he declared he would never allow Langton to set his foot in England in the character of primate; and the pope reciprocated by laying the king's dominions under an interdict. Churches were closed, no bell was tolled, no solemn service performed. The administration of the sacraments, excepting to infants and the dying, was prohibited and the dead were silently buried in un-consecrated ground. Still John was inflexible, and probably would have remained so, had not Philip of France raised a numerous armament at Rouen, as if preparing to make an attack upon England. When John saw that in the war which threatened him he had little chance of success, his prudence dictated another course and when the pope's legate waited upon him, he resolved rather to avert the impending stroke by negotiation and compromise than risk a defeat. He therefore agreed to admit Langton to the archbishopric and renewed his fealty to the pope.

According to popular tradition, "a babbling dream" deterred this monarch from some barbarity and brought him to shame and contrition. The brethren of the Cistercian order having especially provoked his displeasure, after suffering many acts of oppression, the abbots and principals of the order were summoned to Lincoln and in consequence of the firmness they evinced in defending and maintaining their opinions, it is said that John ordered the abbots to be trodden to death by horses but none of his attendants could be found cruel enough to carry his ruthless decree into execution. The abbots, dreadfully alarmed, ran hastily to their inn. During the night the savage monarch dreamt that he was standing before a judge accompanied by these same abbots, who were commanded to scourge him with rods and thongs; and when he awoke in the morning he declared he still felt the smart of the sound thrashing he had received. In his confession to an ecclesiastic of his court, he was recommended to crave pardon of the abbots whom he had so ill-treated and was further assured of the necessity of showing in some way his gratitude for the mysterious interpretation revealed in his dream. So far did the credulous king adopt the advice of his counsellors, that he not only received the Cistercian abbots with kindness, but in remembrance of his dream he granted them a charter for the foundation of Beaulieu Abbey.

The advantages he gave it were very great. In addition to numerous privileges and immunities, he gave a hundred marks towards the erection of the building; but the fabric was raised on such a magnificent scale that, notwithstanding many pious donations which were made during its erection, the sum of four thousand marks more were required before its completion. To raise this money, John granted the impropriation of other church property in Berkshire. Henry III confirmed these grants and added to them freewarren, together with the privilege of taking the fair and market tolls, held on certain days within the manor of Farrendon in Berkshire.

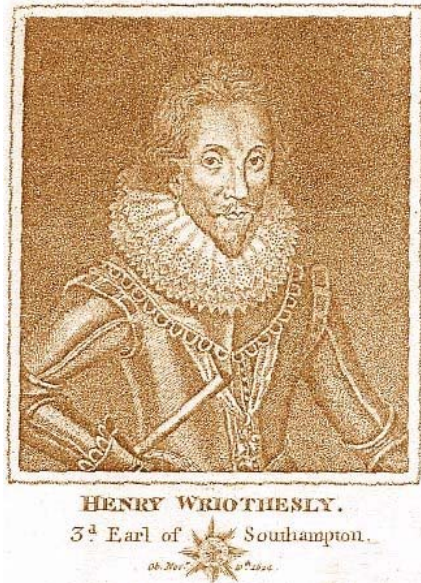
After this, Edward III confirmed all preceding grants, and ordered a tun of wine to be delivered to the monks annually, for the celebration of mass.



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This abbey likewise became especially favoured of holy men, for it was invested with the privilege of sanctuary, was exempted from paying tithes and was endowed with a variety of other valuable distinctions. It has been said that the abbots of Beaulieu Abbey had the right to sit in parliament but this tradition requires corroboration.

It was during the period in which Beaulieu Abbey gave the privilege of sanctuary, that it afforded protection to Margaret of Anjou, the courageous queen of Henry VI and her youthful son who, on their arrival in England, heard of the imprisonment of the king and the destruction of his army, the death of the earl of Warwick and the accession to the throne by Edward IV.



Another celebrated fugitive who claimed its protection was Perkin Warbeck, who, having received a check at Exeter, on his landing in the west of England, fled to this asylum, and continued there some time though every chance of escape was precluded by Lord Daubeney, who surrounded the place with three hundred men. By the promises of Henry VII he was induced to leave his retreat and the result is too well known to be related here.

On the dissolution of monastic establishments in the reign of Henry the Eighth, this abbey proved one of the richest spoils and the manor of Beaulieu, with all its privileges, the rectory and right of patronage excepted, was granted to Thomas Wriothesley, afterwards earl of Southampton which grant was confirmed by James the First.

In the time of William the Third it became the property of Ralph Lord Montagu (afterwards duke of Montagu) by his marriage with the heiress of the Wriothesleys.

Enough still remains of this time-worn abbey to indicate its splendour in "the light of other days:" Its principal features now are the abbot's lodge, and the refectory, the former of which is known as the palace and was fitted up by the predecessor of the last duke of Montagu as a residence. This was about the time of the French war and the Rebellion when, actuated by the military enthusiasm so generally excited, he essayed to convert his abbey into a well-protected castle with moat and drawbridge, lest an adventurous privateer of the enemy should attack him at high tide. The refectory is now used by the inhabitants of Beaulieu as their parish church and it is worthy of careful notice. The roof is old and there is some curious carving in it but the most singular object is an octagonal rostrum or pulpit against the western wall which is now called the martin's nest. Formerly it might have served at meal-times to the edification of the abbey's inmates.

From its present remains there can be no doubt of its having been magnificent in itself and complete in its equipments. There are yet traces of fishponds, and canals and pipes for the conveyance of better water than the river supplied and a little to the north of the abbey there is a place to this day called the Vinery, and it is more than probable that the wine cellars here, as well as in other parts of the south of England, were once supplied from fruit of genuine home-growth.

During the time that John, the second duke of Montagu, was lord of the soil the abbey had its traditions and superstitions but that, at so recent a period, the duke should have himself believed in the mystic art, which

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enabled its adepts to anticipate the realisation of the Pythagorean doctrine, seems scarcely credible. Yet in that day the Witch of Beaulieu, known as Mary Dore, practised the functions of her craft with so much success that she is reported to have died, unlike witches generally, on her bed.

She was not, to be sure, malicious in her profession. She dealt not in evil spells or horrifying incantations but she had a curious power in contracting and dilating her dimensions, could assume the form and imitate on all fours the action of a large specimen (in black) of the feline species, to the fright of the villager curious to know more about her than she intended he should know. Then again, she would represent an owl and these changes were executed with such facility, that her worth would have been inestimable in the incantation scene of Der Freyschutz.

Some of the privileges anciently granted to the manor of Beaulieu are still preserved. According to Gilpin, "no debtor can be arrested within its precincts, unless the lord's leave be obtained. The lords of Beaulieu also enjoy the liberty of the cinque ports. They hunt also and destroy royal deer if they stray within the purlieu of the abbey." He continues, "on the day we were at Beaulieu, we found the hedges everywhere beset with armed men. It appeared as if some invasion were expected. On inquiring we were informed that a stag had been seen that morning in the manor and all the village was in arms to prevent his escape back into the forest. The fortunate man who shot him had a gratuity from the lord."



*Beaulieu Abbey Refectory
Now the Parish Church*