THE DISSOLUTION OF THE ENGLISH NUNNERIES.

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INTRODUCTION.

The English nunneries before the Reformation were neither large, rich nor numerous. Their fall was not in itself an event of any great social significance; as they had been an integral part of the medieval ecclesiastical structure so their fall was involved in the downfall of the structure, scarcely more than a corollary to events far greater. But it is in this very character of a corollary that the study of their suppression may be most amply justified. So closely and entirely were the nunneries involved in the monastic system and their fall in the monastic revolution that they provide a microcosm in which from many points of view the detail of the whole subject may be most conveniently studied. Their position and repute on the eve of the dissolution, the means by which it was carried out and its circumstances, the administrative machinery and the popular criticism of it are all facts likely, if they can be ascertained, to be illuminating to any student of sixteenth century history, and the more satisfactorily so since the subject of the nunneries is small enough to be handled as a whole and involves no dangerous selection of examples.

The question upon which there has often been much concentration as to the ultimate value of medieval life is of course in the last resort dependent upon a difference of principle still far from solution, the question of the value of the contemplative life. The matter is therefore still open to discussion and is likely so to remain for some time to come. But the discussion has lost, in the past, a considerable part of its weight from an insufficient foundation of clear fact. It is, indeed, a matter of common acknowledgment now that the facts, instead of forming the common basis of discussion, have been themselves its chief victims. It may have been natural that the principal interest in the subject should be religious and partisan in nature but the fact has had lamentable effects upon its historical study. It has resulted in two principal anachronisms;
on the one hand a moral judgment based upon insufficient evidence and
formed from the point of view of nineteenth century Protestant morality;
on the other a religious honour largely founded upon an unconscious
assumption of identity between the medieval religious houses and the
more familiar and rather different type characteristic, for example, of the seventeenth century in France. The nuns of four hundred years ago belonged to their own time which was extremely different from ours, and both judgment and praise are irrelevant if they are given without consideration of the standards of the age. History is interested in the nunneries and their dissolution as a matter of social, political, economic and religious importance, from the point of view of the community as a whole, and in proportion as it throws light upon other matters of like nature.

A note may here be added as to the scope of the present essay. Henry VIII's measures applied to nunneries in England, Wales, Ireland, Calais and the Isle of Man. It seems uncertain whether the sisters in Calais had not been driven away before the suppression began by the Oath of Supremacy. There were three obscure nunneries in Ireland, three in Wales, concerning which only one damaged record has been noticed, and one at Douglas in the Isle of Man. This study ignores them all and is confined to the English nunneries in the stricter sense. From them also it makes one great omission, namely the houses of the Gilbertine Order, whose suppression has already been studied with the rest of its history in Miss Rose Graham's monograph and which with its double communities of men and women never lends itself to exact classification among the nunneries.

(1) L & P. viii. 437, 458.
(2) L & P. xi. 1416.
(3) L & P. xi.
(6) S. Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertians. London. 1903.
CONTENTS.

PART I. The Nunneries on the Eve of the Suppression.

Chapter I. The Nunnery Life.

II. The Property of the Nunneries.

III. The Beginning of the End.

PART II. The Dissolution.

Chapter IV. The Nunneries under Cromwell.

V. The Suppression of the Smaller Nunneries.

VI. The Last Years.

CONCLUSION.

APPENDIX I. Bibliography.

II. List of English Nunneries, 1536.

III. Note as to Margaret Vernon, Abbess of Malling.
PART I.

THE NUNNERIES ON THE EVE OF THE SUPPRESSION.

CHAPTER I.

THE NUNNERY LIFE.
CHAPTER I

(A) The Nuns and the class from which they were drawn. Relations with the gentry of the country and their life maintained. Non-religious inhabitants and uses of the nunneries.

(i) Corrodiens.
(ii) Boarders & Pensioners
(iii) Children
(iv) Afflicted and imbecile ladies.

Hence secular tendencies in daily life and customs.

(B) Nunnery Government.

(i) The Head of the House.
(ii) Officials appointed from among the nuns.

"Households" of the officials: their extension in the community a frequent abuse.

The servants employed; dairy-women, hinds. Chaplains, confessors.

(C) The buildings and general circumstances of nunnery life. Evidence from dissolution inventories.

Disuse of the common doctor?

Examples of Buildings:

(i) Brewood Black Ladies.
(ii) Amesbury
(iii) Gresedien.

Learning among the nuns.
Relics and shrines.

Conclusion.
At the beginning of the year 1535 there were in England 126 nunneries, including 2 houses of Austin canonesses. Of these houses, 73 were of the Benedictine order and 25 of the Cistercian; the numbers belonging to other orders were much smaller. They were scattered fairly evenly over the country: the largest number was to be found in Yorkshire where there were 23, most of them very small. The Cistercian order was to a great extent localized in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, though Winchelsea in Hampshire and Taunt Kaines in Dorsetshire were of that order. The Augustinian houses were found most frequently in the south-west. One hundred of these houses at the time of their dissolution contained about 1,156 nuns; the total number of nuns in the country may therefore be put at about 1,500. The position and importance of the communities varied enormously. Between the priory of the Black Ladies of Brewood, with a prioress and two nuns and an income of £11.1.6. and the abbey of Shaftesbury, ranking as a barony, with 57 religious ladies and an income of £1,218.6.0. lies a social difference of great significance. The majority of the nunneries, however, were small and poor. Only 16 of them came above the statutory limit of £200 net income in 1536 and some of them only exceeded it by a few pounds. Some even of the poorer of them were of great importance and influence in their own neighbourhood, as was the case of Pollesworth, of which it was said that its suppression would bring the town to ruin; the influence of the others was negligible or worse.

Throughout their history, the nunneries had many links with the upper classes in their own neighbourhoods, and from these classes their inmates were almost exclusively drawn. The list of


(3) To these must be added the 139 nuns in the Gilbertine houses which are not included in the figures given. See R. Graham, S. Gilbert of Sempingham and the Gilbertines.

(4) Wright: Three Chapters of Letters relating to the Suppression of Monasteries. p. 139.

(5) See Chapter III.
the abbes and prioresses in office at the Dissolution is full
of names renowned in national or local history; Soudamore, Bourchier,
Verney, Vane, Curzon, Sackville, Nudigate, Zouche, Savage, Russell,
may be taken from it at random and the same was true of the nuns.
Nor were the great names confined to the great houses: Joan Aungewen
was prioress of Brodholm, Cecily Suffield of Carney, Elizabeth Throck-
morton of Denny, Margaret Vernon of Little Marlow, at their suppres-
sion. There is, moreover, nothing to indicate that the London
nuneries were exceptions to the general rule. There was certainly
a citizen element also in the nunneries population but its traces are
so rare that it is natural to suppose that it was very small. At
Denny, a house of Clares in Cambridgeshire, the visitors found in
1585 "a fair young woman . . . married to one Ryvell, a merchant ven-
turer of London, with whom she had four children and now desires of
conscience to rejoin her husband." She was a professed nun, for
Legh mentions her as one of those who with tears in their eyes begged
to be dismissed from their vows. Most of the nunneries, as will
be seen hereafter, were as poverty-stricken as they were aristocratic
and perhaps could seldom afford to refuse any one who brought a good
dowry with her. The practice of receiving money for the admission
of a novice had more than a savour of simony but it seems to have
been very general, not with the good will of the bishops, who often
seized the opportunity of the visitation of a nunery to condemn it.
Thus at the visitation of Nuneoton, Lincolnshire, in 1531, the
prioress was enjoined no more to take money for receiving of any nun
into the habit(7) and in 1534 a like injunction was given for Sinning-
thwaite, Yorkshire: (8) the weak point of the episcopal case was re-
vealed in the latter instance by an admission that free offerings
were not forbidden. The practice was urged upon the nuns in many
cases by that perpetual need of ready money which impelled them to

(6) L.& P. ix. 708.
(7) Archaeologia, xlvi, 1883.
(8) Yorkshire Archaeological Journal, xvi.
sell leases and corrodies in a fashion which often crippled their finances. That any nun was ever drawn from a class below the rich bourgeoisie is extremely doubtful, and the dominant class in the nunneries was the country gentry.

The connection of the nunnery with the gentle families from which the individual nuns were drawn was maintained by many and strong links, from the day when the house was founded by a local magnate whose heirs retained certain more or less formal rights over it down to the day on which its goods were sold to the highest bidder among them. It held a place in their life small but difficult to fill; which indeed was perhaps never quite filled until the nineteenth century revolutionized the position of upper-class women. The nunneries contained many who were not professed nuns and had no intention of becoming so. Sometimes there were corrodians who had bought for a lump sum the right to be lodged and boarded by the nuns for the rest of their lives; sometimes they were old servants or poor persons whose support the nuns had undertaken; sometimes ladies who used the nunnery as a temporary resting-place or sanctuary, and sometimes children sent there to be brought up; and all these arrangements had their characteristic forms of corruption.

Both the great and the small houses, for varying reasons were extremely often in financial difficulties and they were often irresistibly tempted to mortgage some of their future income for a lump sum in ready money. The bishop, in the financial interests of the improvident ladies, inveighed frequently against this practice, usually in vain. The Bishop of Lincoln in 1531 ordered the prioress of Studley, as her house was in great debt, to make no grant or fee, corrody, or other:

(9) The Archbishop of York in 1534 enjoined the nuns of Sinningthwaite to grant no corrodies or leases of their demesnes and to receive no nuns or boarders without his licence.

(10) The corrodians were frequently men or married couples; thus the commissioners of 1536 in their report on St Mary's, Winchester, give the names of three gentlemen who had corrodies there.

(11) The obligation

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(9) Archaeologia, xlvii, 1883.
(10) Yorkshire Archaeological Journal, xvi.
like all others given correctly under convent seal, passed to the King at the Dissolution. Richard Rowell and Joan his wife were granted a corrody at Langley in the twentieth year of Henry VIII estimated at £4 a year and it was resigned at the Dissolution for a payment of £8 8s. The commissioners found three persons having their living by purchase at Gracedian and one at Pinley. The classic case of abuse of the practice occurred at Thetford in 1532 though it is difficult to unravel it satisfactorily. At the bishop's visitation in 1526 occurs the concise entry "conceditur corrodium cuidam Foster". At the visitation of 1532 was told the following tale; John Bixley, of Thetford, "bocher", had sold his corrody in the house to Thomas Foster, gentleman,"qui alit nimiam familiam eo praetextu", himself, his wife, three children and a maid. Bixley, however, asserted that he had never sold the corrody and publicly produced his indenture. The bishop's decision has not survived but it looks as though the nuns had repented of their bargain and were trying by questionable means to get rid of Mr Foster and his burdensome household. Their irritation seems natural when it is remembered that Thetford had ten nuns and an income of £0 10.7.

Besides the persons who had a status in the house by corrody under convent seal there were others whose position was less clearly defined. The commissioners reported that there were in residence at Gracedian nine persons found of alms. At Pollesworth they found "having living by promise one very old and impotent creature some time cook of the house". After the dissolution of Acornbury "rewards" were paid to the servants and to a certain decrepit woman. At St Mary's, Winchester, pensions of 6s were

(14) Jessopp: Visitations of the Diocese of Norwich, 1492-1532.
(15) Valor Ecclesiasticus, III, 313.
(17) Augm. O.M. Bks, 278, Hereford.
were granted to twelve poor women called sisters and one of £4 to Margaret Shelley, perhaps a relative of the abbess, (16) Elizabeth Shelley; ladies living for a time in a nunnery without definite status may sometimes be included in the lists of "nuns not professed" which occurs at the headings of episcopal visitations, for they seem sometimes to have continued for some years without profession, though undoubtedly the term was more usually applied to novices. Sometimes the King made use of a nunnery either as a lodging or a prison for some great lady; thus in November, 1536, when the suppression of the smaller houses was well under way, the abbess of Sion was instructed to be ready to receive the Lady Margaret Douglas. (19) More frequently the nunnery proved convenient to the family and friends of the prioress herself and in the visitations of the less well-ordered houses complaints of this are very frequent. The Bishop of Lincoln in 1531 enjoined the prioress of Nuneaton, among other things, no more to charge her house with such a number of her kinsfolk as she had in times past. "Your good mother it is meet you have with you for your comfort and hers both and one or two more of such your saddest kinsfolk." (20) At a visitation of the little priory of Ruspine Sussex in 1521 one of the nuns complained that the house was burdened with expenses by reason of friends and relatives of the prioress "ibidem continere hospitancium." (21) A nun of Flixton in 1520 said that the prioress's mother was supported by the priory; she did not know whether she said anything or not; "supervิดet tamen Le Deyry." (22)

(19) L. & P. xi. 994.
(20) Archaeologia, xlvi, 1883.
(22) Jessopp, op. cit.
Some of the nunneries were used as schools for the daughters of gentlemen. This was not nearly so usual as is sometimes supposed. In all the Norwich visitations which Dr. Jessopp published there is only one mention of a child, the daughter of one J. Jervis, gentleman, who had her nourished at Thetford and paid nothing for her, unless we may count the little boys who were stated to have been allowed to sleep in the dortor at Red- ingfield contrary to the rule. The nunneries which habitually accepted little girls and brought them up seem to fall roughly into two classes. There were, first of all, a number of the greater and more renowned houses such as Godstow where Burnet says that most of the young gentlewomen of the country were sent to be bred, (Burnet, ed. Pocock, 1865, p.) and S. Mary's, Winchester where the commissioners in 1536 reported twenty-six daughters of lords, knights and gentlemen. A few glimpses into the lives of the children can be found in the Lisle Correspondence, for when Lord Lisle was Deputy of Calais his daughter, Bridget like the Anglo-Indian children of to-day, was left at school. The Abbess of Winchester wrote to Lady Lisle from time to time reporting on Bridget's health; at one time she had been allowed to go to some friends for a week's holiday; at another the abbess is explaining how she has caused kirtles to be made for her out of her old gowns. A certain John Glasey took a "young gentlewoman" to be brought up and "proveseed" at Shaftesbury as his daughter who was in reality a natural daughter of Cardinal Wolsey; when the visitors went there in 1535 they ordered her to be dismissed because she was not quite twenty-four and Glasey wrote privately to Cromwell that "she hathe commandment to departe and knowthe not whether" and begging that she might be allowed to stay there till she was old enough to be professed. Another

(23) Ibid., 1532. (28) L. & P. ix. 228.
(24) Ibid., 1514. (29) L. & P. ix. 228.
(27) L. & P. xi. 527. -6-
Another nunnery school well spoken of was at Pollesworth, though perhaps it ought rather to be reckoned in the second class, that of nunneries in remote parts of the country where the daughters of the neighbouring gentry were sent as to little islands of civilisation. Such was Wilberforce in Yorkshire where a child of Cromwell's daughter was living in 1537, and Acornbury, where, said the Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, the gentlemen of Abergavenny and the adjoining parts of Wales had commonly their women-children brought up in virtue and learning.

But on the whole, convent education must have been the exception, not the rule, and five hundred would probably be an extremely liberal estimate of the number of girls receiving it in the years just before the suppression.

The nunneries were of service to the upper classes in another and more questionable way. They were the refuge for all who by reason of insanity, deformity or some other affliction were ineligible for the ordinary life of their class. Usually they seem to have been professed in the ordinary way. At the visitation of Thetford in 1514 a complaint was made that the prioress intended shortly to receive one Dorothy Sturges, an unlearned and deformed lady, among the nuns. There was already one Elizabeth Hankeworth among them whom the sub-prioress declared to be "aliquando lunatica". The Bishop of Chichester found one nun who is described as "idœota" at Easebourne in 1524. The Commissioners in 1536 described the ladies of Langley, adding the note "one other is in regard a folie." Certain ladies of the Minories petitioned Cromwell in that year, asking among other

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(29) Wright, p. 139.
(30) L. & P. xii. (2) 549.
(31) L. & P. xi. 1370.
(32) Jessopp.
(33) Sussex Archaeological Collections, IX.
things what was to be done with two girls of 12 and 13 years, Margaret FitzgA;reid, dumb and deaf and Julian Heron, an idiot fool; in the pension list in 1539 after the surrender of the house Margaret FitzgA;reid appears as a professed nun and "Julian Heron the idiot" was pensioned with the lay sisters and the pension afterwards cancelled.

The records of visitations show the bishops continually struggling against the effects of the secular tendencies nourished in the nunnery life by these customs. Again and again the injunctions not to permit the nuns to go out of the precincts without good reason or alone, not to let them pay long visits to their friends and relatives except in cases of sickness, not to receive or write letters without the knowledge of the prioress. The life of the nuns continually tended, except in a few cases, to approximate to that of lay-women of the class from which they were drawn, a tendency much assisted by the social homogeneity of the community. The Christmas games at Carrow may serve to illustrate this. At the visitation of 1526, one of the nuns complained as follows:

Item habent in festo Natalis Domini juniores moniales in abbatissam assumptam vocandi gratia; cuius occasione ipsa consumere et dissipare cogitur quae vel elmosina vel aliorum amicorum largitione acquisit.

The injunctions included "quod de cetero non observetur assumptio abbatisse vocandi causa."

This constant intercourse with the world frequently led to a number of minor breaches of the Rule, especially as regards the observance of silence, attendance at the Offices, reading at meal-times and other such small points, and in general to a certain lowness of standard, religious rather than moral. Sometimes it issued in elaborate dress and other vanities, but very few instances of this are known in the sixteenth century. The ladies of Elstow, a fashionable nunnery and always rather worldly, were enjoined in 1531 "that from henceforth no

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(35) L. & P. ix. 1075: xiv.(1) 680.  (36) Jessopp,
sister presume to wear their apparells upon their heads after lay fashion with cornered crests nor showing the forehead," and their gowns and kirtles were to be close afore and no more to use red stomachers. The nuns of Romsey in 1523 were enjoined to keep their foreheads covered to the middle. (37) The subprioress of Carrow complained in 1532 "aliquae sororum utuntur cingulis sive zonis cericis, usum hujusmodi commendantes" but no mention was made of it in the injunctions. (38)

The government of the house was in the hands of an elected head and a varying number of subordinate officials appointed by her from among the nuns. The election of the head of a nunnery was subject to the same formalities and the same various influences as that of other ecclesiastical dignitaries. The purchase of a congé d'élire was so expensive a business that some of the poorer nunneries had the custom that it should be granted them for nothing (40) but in the case of all houses, great and small, the royal influence, frequently exercised, was the determining factor. (41) The temporalities of course reverted to the King during vacancies and were only restored upon the completion of the election. In some cases, however, as at S. Mary's, Winchester, (42) a royal grant had bestowed the right of custody during voidances. Once elected, the authority of the superior over the nuns was limited only by episcopal visitation and by practical possibility; she might be from time to time called to account by her bishop, when the nuns would

(37) Archaeologia, xlvii.
(38) H.G.D. Liveing: Records of Romsey Abbey.
(39) Jessopp. (40) e.g. Carrow: L.& P. viii. 307.
have an opportunity of explaining their grievances each alone, and occasionally she might be met with organised sedition which would make it impossible for her to fulfil her functions, but even in such cases if she had any proportion of right upon her side, the bishop would usually help her to crush the revolt, for the vow of obedience did not admit of treasonable combinations. The complaints uttered at the visitations displayed a considerable variety of grievance. The Bishop of Lincoln in 1531 enjoined the prioress of Nuncetun to use herself as a good mother and not give light credence to every "tale which is nourished of debate and variance". At Simonstwaite in 1534 the Archbishop's injunctions included a command that the prioress should not ill-use her sisters for anything said or done at the visitation, nor they to "grue" at the prioress; and in 1514 a nun of Reddiffe told the bishop that they dared not speak the truth "propter saevitatem priorissae." At Campsey in 1532 a complaint was made that the prioress was too severe to her sisters and showed no more favour to the elder than to the younger of them; at the same visitation many nuns complained of domestic grievances; the prioress was stingy in feeding her own table, the nuns, and the guests, alike, the meat was not always good and the cook was sometimes nearly two hours late with meals. One of the most frequent complaints was that the prioress did not render account regularly before her sisters in chapter and the bishops seem to have struggled in vain against this irregularity. Another complaint frequently and bitterly made by the nuns was that the prioress did not pay them an allowance for dress and pocket-money which seems to have been generally customary. At the visitation

(43) Archaeologia, xlvii.
(44) Yorkshire Archaeological Journal, xvi.
(45) Jessopp: this collection is full of complaints of partiality or over-severity and counter-complaints of disobedience.
(46) Jessopp, passim.
of Easebourne, Sussex, in 1521, three of the five nuns complained that they had no clothing from the prioress nor the customary stipend of 13/4 to buy it; (47) the same complaint was made at Carrow in 1532. (48) The prioress of Campsey at that visitation was stated to have withheld 6/8 a year which each nun ought to have received for the Obit of William Ut ford. (49)

Once elected, the superior often held her office till her death, even in extreme old age and several were said to be very aged when the houses were suppressed. The abbess of Pollesworth, Warwickshire, left her house in perfect order, financially and otherwise, as all witnesses agreed, and when it was surrendered Dr Loudon wrote as much to the Chancellor of the Augmentations; he had assigned her a pension of £26.13.4. and with her virtuous reputation and great age he thought she rather deserved more than less. (50) The same commissioner assigned a pension of £40 to Clementina Stock, last prioress of Delapre, Northampton, because she was sickly and aged and could not long enjoy it. (51) In other cases, however, an aged prioress laid down the burden of government and was generally given an assured living and dignity in the convent by a grant under convent seal of certain rights for her life: a fixed income or board and lodging for herself and her maid, or both, always including a separate chamber. Sometimes she survived to be a thorn in the flesh of her successor; the prioress of Flixton complained of her predecessor's disobedience, at the visitation of 1520. (52)

In the great abbeys the abbess lived in a state and dignity comparing favourably with that of most of the greatest ladies in the land. The Abbess of Barking only sat in the frator

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(47) Sussex Archaeological Collections, ix.
(48) Jessopp.
(49) Ibid.
(50) L. & P. xiv. (1) 237.
(51) L. & P. iii (2) 1128.
(52) Jessopp.
at the five principal feasts; her house formed an entirely separate establishment with its own staff of servants and its own kitchen. (53) The principal subordinate officers in such houses had also each her own household on a smaller scale and there was sometimes land which belonged especially to certain offices as was nearly always the case in the greater houses of monks; (54) the Valor Ecclesiasticus gives particulars of a manor of the gross value of £38.4.10. "assigned" to the abbess of Shaftesbury and of an income from several sources of £73 which belonged to William Breton who held the office of sacristan there. The list of servants found at S. Mary's, Winchester, in 1536 included a gentlewoman, a servant, and a laundress for the abbess and servants for the prioress, sub-prioress and sexton, each in her house. (56) The household of the superior seems sometimes to have been the cause of discord in the community. A nun of Carrow in 1492 said that the prioress's servants wrought great loss to the goods of the priory. At Warham's visitation in 1511 a nun of Sheppey complained that the menservants of the prioress spoke improperly of the convent. (57) In the normal type of nunnery, where house, income and number of inmates were alike small, the superior's state was proportionately reduced, but her privileges were always numerous enough to form an outward sign of the unique position in the community in which the vow of obedience placed her. Her private chamber, table and woman-servant seem to have been customary even in small and poor

(53) See "The Chartle Ionung to the Office of Celeresse of the Monasterye of Barkinge", printed in Dugdale, I.443
(54) e.g. Bury S. Edmunds, V.E. III, 459-
(55) V.E. I, pp 276 ff. The sacristan was more usually one of the nuns.
(56) Augm: Off: Misc: Bks 400, fo. 26 ff.
houses. It was usual for one of the nuns to act as her chaplain and sleep in her chamber; the chaplain's functions are never clearly explained, but one of the chief of them seems to have been to act as a witness to the prioress's good conduct. The nuns at visitations frequently complained either that the prioress had no chaplain or that she kept the same lady as her chaplain permanently, and the bishops gave injunctions that she should have each of the ladies as her chaplain for a time, in rotation.

Under the abbess or prioress, the business of the community was carried out by officials appointed by her from among the nuns, sub-prioress, third prioress, sacristan, almoner, cellarer, precentrix, succentrix, cantarista, firmaress, "refectuaria", "cameraria", mistress of the novices. The full staff was necessary only in the greater houses but a good many of these officials appear even in houses quite small and poor though two of them were in that case often held by one lady. Thus Carrow in 1526 contained a prioress and eight ladies and had a sub-prioress, precentrix and third prioress, sacristan and "refectuaria". The appointment and removal of these officials was subject to the confirmation of the bishop as at Romsey, in 1527, when the sub-prioress and sacristan, who had already been removed by the abbess, was removed by the bishop's Vicar General in visitation and her two offices given to two other ladies.

The extension of the system of separate "households" in the life of the nuns seems to have been one of the principal temptations of the more worldly houses. At the visitation of Elstow in 1531, the bishop found that "the very order of S. Benet his rules" were not observed as to keeping the frator at meal-times, where the sisters should be as well fed spiritually with holy scripture as bodily with meat, "but customably they resort to certain places called thir households where much insolency is in use," and he enjoined that no such household be

(57) e.g. Flixton, 1520. (58) e.g. Redlingfield, 1514.
(59) Jessopp.
(60) H.G.D. Liveing: Records of Romsey Abbey. 1906
(61) Archaeologia xlvi. Misericorde was not the frator but
kept in future but only one place to be called Misericorde, to be served in turn by one "sadde" lady and five assistants, to be changed regularly. The abbess was commanded to have no more sisters in her household than four with her chaplain and all the sisters to be there in turn. The ladies of Sinningthwaite were enjoined in 1534 to eat all at one table and sleep in the dortor. The converse injunction was given at Nuncoton in 1531 "that none lie in your dortor but religious women, each alone."

Another abuse which tended to appear in the fairly prosperous and more fashionable houses was the maintenance of a large staff of servants. The ladies of Studley were enjoined in 1531 not to overcharge themselves with so many servants and the ladies of Nuncoton at the same visitation "that ye straight diminish the number of your servants which is a great cause of your miserable poverty." The practice of serving, in turn, in the kitchen and frator was probably one of the first to be evaded when the zeal of a community grew cool. It seems to have been pretty general still in the majority of the nunneries in 1536, for the Commissioners's lists of servants found in the houses usually add that the women-servants were dairy-women, brewers or laundresses. The numbers of course varied with the size of the house. The staff of S. Mary's, Winchester, consisted of 13 lay sisters, 9 women servants and 2 laundresses to the convent and of 20 men servants, barbers, cooks, clerks etc.; as S. Mary's had no demesne lands in hand their list did not include what was generally the most numerous category, that of yeomen and hinds to work the demesnes. For example at Gracedien the Commissioners found 9 women "for the dairy and other necessaries," a yeoman and 26 hinds, at Langley 4 dairy-women and 10 hind, at Pollesworth 9 women servants, 8 yeomen and 17 hinds.

(61) continued but a hall where the eating of flesh was permitted See G.G. Coulton, Medieval Studies, xi. p. 22.

(62) Yorkshire Archaeological Journal xvi.

(63) Archaeologia, xlvii.

(64) Archaeologia, xlvii.

(65) Augm. Office Misc. Bks 400; fo. 26 ff.

(66) Exch: Treas: of the Receipt Misc: Bks 154: Leicester, Warwick
The little nunnery at Rusper, Sussex, which leased all its lands had 2 women servants only. (67) At Sheppey in 1511, indeed complaint was made to the Archbishop at his visitation that they had no woman-servant at all so that they had each to pay 2/- a year to have their washing done by a woman from the town and when they were ill they had to hire a woman to attend upon them. (68)

In 1534 the Archbishop of York enjoined the ladies of Sinningthwaite to keep no secular women to serve them; in case of sickness the firmaress was to appoint a nurse from among the nuns. On the other hand the prioress of Nunappleton was commanded to provide a laundress "according to the old laudable custom of that house." (69)

The chaplains of the nunneries were always reckoned with the hinds and other servants all alike holding their posts at the will of the prioress. Thus in the Receivers' Accounts after the suppression occur such entries as:

"pro vadiis et libertatibus tempore dissolutionis insolutis - - - vii servientibus cum i capellano, £1.16.8. (Henwood) - - - - vi servientibus cum i capellano (Finley) - - 14 servientibus cum iii capellanis 'ibidem existentibus ad separalia tempora hoc anno £8.5.6. (Wroxall)" (70)

At Wroxall, by the way, the chaplain was also required to serve the cure there, the benefice being appropriate to the nunnery and no vicar appointed. The ladies of Pollesworth had 3 priests, those of Winchester a confessor and 4 other priests. It seems to have been considered an abuse for a nunnery to be without a chaplain; even Rusper had one; but they were often without a resident.

(67) Suppression Papers, 833/39.

(68) E.N.R. VI. pp. 18-35.

(69) Yorkshire Archaeological Journal, xvii.

(70) Receivers' Accounts, Warwick, Augm. Office Misc: Bks 278.


(73) Augm. Off: Misc: Bks, 400.

(74) Suppression Papers, Vol. iii.
confessor, whose services of course were both more serious and less frequently required than those of their mass-priest. It was a common complaint at visitations that the opportunities for confession were insufficient. At Crabhouse at the visitation of 1514 "conqueritur — quod non habet nec potest habere frequentem accessum ad confessorem pro confessione." (75) At Blackborough in 1532 the bishop asked who was wont to hear the nuns' confessions and was told that it was a certain Dominican of Lynn Episcopi. (76) The Bishop of Lincoln in 1531 commanded the ladies of Nuncotone "that ye suffer no more friars to serve within your monastery but such virtuous honest secular priests as my commissary, or you, shall judge meet for you." (77)

Vivid glimpses of the circumstances of the nuns' daily life can sometimes be won from the inventories of household goods taken at the dissolution. The inventories are of two kinds; some of them the inventory indented between the commissioners and the prioress, taken at the survey made under the Act of 1536, others the list of goods, sold and unsold, sent in by the Receiver with his first accounts after the actual dissolution. Only a few of either kind have survived and most of them are manifestly incomplete, whatever may be the explanation of that. (78) But the average nunnery was so poor that even in their incompleteness the inventories are to some extent witnesses to the thoroughness with which the work of dissolution was done. The receiver was mainly interested in certain definite valuable species of movable goods, plate, church ornaments, lead and bells, grain, seed and agricultural animals, and practically all receivers' accounts contain particulars of these; they were not usually very valuable in the nunneries but more so than the fittings and furniture

(75) Jessopp; this house was certainly in considerable disorder in 1514 and the lady who complained had already described the offenses of nearly everyone else there so the example is perhaps not quite fair.
(76) Ibid.
(77) Archaeologia, xlvii,
(78) e.g. (1) Sopwell: P.R.O. hand Revenue Church Goods, 12/30 (11)Gracedien: P.R.O. Exch: Augm: Office Misc:Bks 172 fo. 76.
with which we are at present concerned. One of the matters upon which these inventories throw light is the surprising number of rooms apparently used in the nunneries. Thus at Kilburn there is mention of three "chambers" as well as the hall, buttery, pantry, cellar, brewhouse and bakehouse, but no dortor. (79) At Flamstead a parlour, quire, vestry, kitchen and buttery, and two chambers, and again no dortor. (80) At Brusyard, with the usual other rooms, five chambers, and again no dortor. (81) The little house of the Black Ladies of Brewood had two chambers but no dortor. (82) There was a dortor at Gracedien and the nuns' "seles out of it were sold for £1.10.0. (83) and at Castle Hedingham where the only goods mentioned in it are church vestments and altar linen; there was no vestry so that these things were probably kept in presses there as a lady sometimes keeps her house-linen. But the evidence of the inventories of Kilburn, Flamstead, Brusyard and Brewood, small houses in different parts of England, suggest that the rule as to sleeping together in the dortor may have been sometimes so completely forgotten that the building of the house ignored it.

The house of Brewood Black Ladies which was one of the poorest in the kingdom may be taken as typical of one end of the scale. The prioress and two nuns there had a church vestry, chapter-house, hall, parlour, two chambers, buttery, kitchen, larder, brewhouse and some other offices. (85) At the other end of the scale the abbey of Amesbury will serve as an example. Its buildings were divided by the commissioners who took its surrender into two categories. Those "assigned to remain" were the prioress's lodging, with its hall, buttery, pantry, kitchen and

(79) Dugdale, iii. 424.
(80) P.R.E. hand Revenue, Church Goods, 12/30.
(81) Suppression Papers 833/38.
gatehouse "as it is enclosed within one Quadrant unto the Convent kitchen", the long stable with its hay-barn, the wheat-barn, the gate and gatehouse in the base Court. Those "deemed to be superfluous" were the church, cloister, frater, dortor, chapter-house, convent kitchen with houses adjoining, the old firmary with chapel, cloister and lodging adjoining, the Sextery with houses joining, the steward's, auditor's, receiver's and priest's lodgings and all other houses in the base court "above not reserved", the buildings of a great monastery of the type made familiar by many cathedrals. Between these two extremes came the nunnery of Gracedien of which the commissioners in 1536 said that its church, quire and cloister were fair and the rest in good repair but of no stately building; the inventory at the dissolution gives more detail. There was a church and vestry dortor, cloister, chapter-house, frater, five bedchambers, dining chamber, hall, buttery, larder house, kitchen, candlehouse, brewhouse, yelehouse, laundry, salt-house, bakehouse, kyllhouse, and smith's forge. Its furniture was poor and much of it described as old. Thus the fittings of the hall, "iii oute tables, iii formes, i piece of hangyng of rodd say" were sold together for 2/; those of the Chapter, "i table of alebaster, the glasse, ieron and pavement" for 15/., and the whole contents of the Church, including "i table of wode, ones the high alter" "certen olde ymages" and the glass, iron and pavement in the Church and steeple for £15. Books of any kind are rarely mentioned among the goods of the small houses whose inventories have survived. The necessary service-books must usually have been in the quire and occasionally they are mentioned among the church-stuff: one mass-book is mentioned at Brewood Black Ladies and two mass-books and

(86) Augm; Off: Misc: Bks 494, fo. 31.
(87) Exch: Treas: of the Rec: MiscN Bks 154, Leicester: its gross income was £101.6.2. (V.E. iv.175.), that of Brewood F.I. £11.1.6. (V.E. 111.103) and of Amesbury £95.4.11 (V.E. 11.93.)
(88) P.R.O. Exch: Augm: Office Misc: Bks 172, fo. 76.
(89) They were mentioned incidentally sometimes at the bishop's visitations. See Jessopp: Campsey, 1526, Thetford, 1514.
promised her his favour. Then a servant of Mr. Wat's came on a like errand, saying that he had gained a promise from Cromwell and had compounded with the King also. The abbess wrote to Cromwell to know what answer she should make to all men as these tidings did "not a little mar" her. The house survived until the autumn of the year, 1538, when the abbess took the next step by an attempt to provide for her future. She wrote to Cromwell suggesting that she might be given leave to sell the manor of Cornarde, Suffolk, the property of the house, which brought in a yearly rent of £40, and pay off the servants, provide for the sisters and buy for herself a living with such of her friends as would take her. If he would not sanction this composition, she asked that the sisters should each be given £4 pension and she £50 a year to be paid out of certain lands with a clause of distress. Close upon this followed the surrender of the house, after which she wrote acknowledging a letter from him; she perceived it was the King's pleasure that she should go to Cromwell and would be with him on the following Friday. She trusted he would remember her age and unambleness to journey so far in one day. The pensions which were awarded to the abbey did not quite come up to the standard she had suggested; she was given £40 a year and her eleven nuns sums varying from £3.6.8. to £2.13.4.

We catch a last glimpse of her, an invincible courtier, in January 1539, when she wrote to Cromwell from Haknay, saying that she heard there was a little gentlewoman with Mr Saddler whom she would fain have the governance and bringing up: "it were to my comfort now in mine age". Also she had heard that Lady Salisbury's house at Bysham was in the King's hands and she asked Cromwell to help her to buy it or on default or that some other house.

(11) XIII (2) 716.
(12) 717.
(13) 718.
(14) Dugdale, iii, 381.
(15) XIV (1), 130.
and six books of parchment at Castle Hedingham. At Kilburn, in "the chamber next to the Churcbe" were found two books of Legenda Aurea, "the one in print, the other wryten, bothe Englyshe," valued at 4d and among some miscellaneous goods unsold appear four processions in parchment and paper, two Legendes "the one in parchment and thoder in paper" and two chests with "divers bokes perteynyng to the whirche, bokes of no value". So far as the dissolution records are concerned there is hardly any evidence of any value as to the degree of learning common among the nuns. An ordinary amount of reading and writing they almost certainly had; all the surviving letters from abbesses, prioresses or other nuns are signed in the same hand as they are written in and many of them are very well formed compositions. It was said in favour of one Joan Vane, proposed as prioress of Dartford that "although ther are in the house many elder than she is, yet is ther none better learnede nor more disreter than she"(90) but this proves extremely little. The brief record of a visitation at Thetford in 1526 included the note "non habent eruditricem". (91) The injunctions issued by the Archbishop of York in 1534-5 were in English for nunneries although the injunctions issued to the monks after the same visitation were in Latin. (92) The negative evidence seems strong enough to establish a presumption that although the ladies were not actually illiterate, anything that could fairly be called learning among them was probably unknown.

Another matter upon which the evidence is slight must be touched upon, that of relics and objects of pilgrimage in the nunneries. The only case in which a nunnery achieved any degree of fame as a place of pilgrimage was that of Sion with its image of S. Bridget. Concerning relics of the less conspicuous kind which obtained only local repute there is very little information. The celebrated document known as "Compendium Comperorum" (93) will be discussed later as to its value.

(90) L. & P. xii. 1524.
(91) Jessopp. (92) Yorkshire Archaeological Journal, xvi.
(93) L. & P. x. 364.
for moral judgment upon the nuns but as regards the relics and other things which it concisely describes under the heading "superstitio" it may perhaps be accepted with less reserve as they are more tangibly matters of fact. It was concerned only with the northern and some of midland houses. The nuns of Wallingwells had an image of the Virgin said to have been found at the foundation of the house. At Nunkeeling, Nuntholme and Holdholm were fragments of the Holy Cross. Pilgrimages were made to Hampole "ad S. Ricardum non canonizatum". At Arden there was an image of S. Bridget to which the country women made offerings for their lost or sick cows. At Wykeham and at S. Clement's, York, pilgrimage was made "ad Sanctum Sytham". S. Clement's and Basdale paid reverence to the milk of the Blessed Virgin. All the other relics were believed to be of benefit to women in childbirth; a girdle and part of the tunic of S. Francis at Gracedien, a girdle of the virgin at Arthington, a girdle of S. Thomas of Canterbury at Chester, a finger of S. Stephen at Holdholm, an arm of S. Margaret and a tunic of S. Bernard at Sinningthwaite. Such little holy places must have been scattered all over England in the middle ages but on the eve of the suppression they probably attracted very little veneration; even the greatest of them was of little financial profit to its proprietors. (95)

The life of the nunneries in its superficial aspects does on the whole justify the assertion that it belonged to the social order of a certain age and class rather than to an unchanging religious order handed down through the centuries. The nunnery did little to redeem its inmates from the intense provincialism which marked the life of their sisters in the world but neither did it usually accentuate it; freedom lost in one direction was fully compensated in others, practically if not in theory, and few lay women attained a position of such independence and dignity as the head of any nunnery enjoyed. Its functions and uses were universally regarded as many and very various and its ladies, moved to the religious life by diverse

(94) Presumably Richard Rolle.

(95) V.E. i, 424 "Ablaciones oblatae ad imaginem See Brigitte"
motives, instinctively lived according to the traditions and customs of the class to which they all belonged. Society during the preceding centuries had learned to demand many other things of it than a refuge for the fulfilment of the contemplative vocation and indeed had almost ceased to demand that, and the nuns with that practical common-sense characteristic of the medieval English had reformed their ideals in accordance with the new standard.
PART II.

CHAPTER II.

THE PROPERTY OF THE NUNNERIES.
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(A) General description of the authorities for their economic condition:
   (i) Receivers' Accounts.
   (ii) Surveys.
   (iii) "Valor Ecclesiasticus"

(B) Sketch of ordinary nunnery revenues. exx. Marham, Aukerwyke.

(C) Financial Administration.
   (i) Rusper: exhaustive lease.
   (ii) The single-staff houses: chief revenue in rents.
   (iii) The manorial type.

Steward, understeward etc.

Description of the staff of Sion.

Were some of the small houses managed without officials?

(D) Analysis of revenues and necessary payments, chiefly based on the "Valor Ecclesiasticus".
   (i) Spiritualties: oblations and alms, demesne tithe, appropriated benefices and tithes.
       Payment of vicars, chantries, alms.
   (ii) Profits of courts, markets and fairs, mills.
       Rents received and paid.
   (iii) Demesne lands: in hand or farmed: enclosures of arable and of pasture.

(E) Their economic position in general: were their revenues decaying?
The records which illuminate the economic position of the monasteries on the eve of their dissolution fall into three principal classes. In the first are the surviving Receivers' Accounts, rendered every year by the county receivers in the Court of Augmentations, for such monastic lands as remained in the hands of the crown in their districts. These accounts are in some ways extremely valuable, especially those for the first year after the dissolution; they throw a flood of light, for example, upon the administrative methods by which the suppression was carried out. But for general economic and statistical purposes they have to be handled with extreme care and are often quite incomprehensible without a detailed study of all the records concerning a special religious house; for example, the total value of the lands of a monastery as given in the accounts for the year after the suppression would have to be checked by an exact knowledge from other sources of any grants that had been made out of its lands before the total would even approximate to the value of the property of that house before it was dissolved. The second class comprises the surveys and inventories made by the commissioners at the time of the dissolution itself. These were of course made with the King's interests chiefly in mind, and with a view to future leases and sales, they probably tended to exaggerate the value of the property where that was possible; nevertheless they supply excellent material for such a study as this in the cases in which they have survived. They are, however, so few and so incomplete as to provide no data upon which generalizations of any kind could safely be based. The larger and more interesting part of those which exist are surveys of demesnes, as the accounts and the Valor Ecclesiasticus seldom give any really clear information about the demesnes these surveys are especially valuable for the study of the whole subject is undoubtedly that known as Valor Ecclesiasticus, a survey of all the property of the Church compiled in 1560 for the assessment of the tenth lately appropriated by the King. The information for the survey was sent in by the incumbents themselves and arranged by the King's Commissioners appointed in each county. The terms of the commissioners required considerable detail in the information
to be given and there seems reason to believe that this fact coupled with the zeal of the Commissioners to keep the Tenth as high as possible, checked on the whole the opposite tendency of the religious to minimize their income and their liability to the Tenth. (2)

The Valor, in the form in which it has survived and was printed by the Record Commission, is, however, by no means of equal value for the whole country. For Hampshire it gives the gross and net income only; while for the Oxfordshire nunneries we have a fairly full survey of the demesnes and a detailed analysis of the tithe. The returns for six counties and for parts of two others are entirely wanting and the only information we can obtain about them is the net income and tenth as recorded in the official excerpt called liber Valorum. (3) Thus the only total which can be given with any exactitude for the whole country is that of the net income, an artificial sum upon which the tenth was assessed, obtained by subtracting from the gross income the necessary spiritual payments of synodals and proxies, the rents due to superior lords, the alms and obits which had to be maintained under the wills of benefactors and the fees of the regular receivers, bailiffs, auditors and stewards. (4) The total number of English nunneries in 1535 was 126 but only 100 of them are described with any detail in the Valor and general statements concerning nunneries revenues must be qualified by this fact. There was also, not unnaturally.


(3) M.S, P.R.O, Literary Search Room.

(4) See the commission, printed at the beginning of Vol.I.
a certain amount of variation from county to county, not only in the arrangement of returns but also in the interpretation of the terms of the commission. Thus in Norfolk, Northants, Bucks and Monmouthshire and in certain cases in Kent and in Cumberland, allowance was made for the stipend of the convent chaplain but this was not done elsewhere. On the whole, however, these varieties of interpretation are relatively unimportant.

More important and interesting are the local variations in the use of terms which sometimes make it dangerous to use the authority of the Valor on those very points upon which it might be most valuable. For example, the information, given by the Valor as to the rents from which most nunneries received the bulk of their income would be infinitely more valuable if the terms in which they are described were always definite enough for the exact nature of the rent in question to be seen, but this is very rare. Even the word "firma" which seems in some cases to have the definite meaning of rent from leasehold is also used in some cases where it apparently has not that meaning, and where the word "redditus" is used there is generally no indication whether it applies to freehold, copyhold, or tenancy at will.

The Valor is, as Professor Savile points out, essentially a Geld Book, and it is only incidentally and accidentally that it gives the information we seek as to the actual life and position of the religious houses it describes.

Speaking generally, the most conspicuous feature of the nunneries as described in the Valor is their smallness and poverty. All the English nunneries, with sixteen exceptions, came under the provisions of the Act of 1536 for the dissolution of religious houses whose net income fell below £200 a year, although a number of them succeeded in buying exemption from it for a time. Some of them were so poor that it is difficult to understand how the house could be maintained at all. Thus the

entire income of Rothwell is Northants was derived from one appropriated rectory: its gross income was £10.10.4. and its net income, after paying synodals and proxies, the stipend of the vicar (£20s) and of the convent chaplain (£2.13.4.) was £5.19.8. The house of the Black Ladies of Brewood, Staffs, had an income of £11.1.6. derived from demesne in hand, rents and alms, but no allowances were made from it; the gross and net incomes were identical. These houses were of course rather below the average of poverty but they were by no means unique. The four nunneries in Buckinghamshire had a total gross income of £196.13.7. the three in Worcestershire of £175.17.2. and the two in Cumberland of £31.10.6. At the other end of the scale stood the four nunneries in Hampshire with a total gross income of £1,236.19.10. The average gross income for the hundred houses of which particulars are available was £150 but the variations are so striking that this average is of relatively little interest.

The income as given in the Valor was often, though not always, divided under the headings "spiritual" and "temporal". The spiritualties included not only tithes and oblations but also the glebe lands and other profits of appropriated rectories; for example at Shaftesbury the spiritualties included the profits of a court. The distinction was therefore a technical one and there was often little or no difference between the sources of the two kinds of income. Nearly all the nunneries received some spiritual income but the temporal revenues were commonly larger derived from demesne in hand or leased, from rents and profits of court and a few other sources comparatively insignificant in most cases, mills, fishponds, woods, etc. Marham Abbey, a small

(8) V.E. IV. 302. (11) II. 4-16.
(7) V.E. III. 103. (12) I. 392-432.
(8) EV. 220-250. (13) I. 276.
(9) III. 250,282,276.
(10) V. 265, 291.
nunnery in Norfolk, may be taken almost at random as an example. The nuns of Marham had a gross income of £42.4.7. £2.13.4 came from the rectory of Dudlyington and 10s as a pension from the vicar of Stowbedon. The temporalities comprised the rents and farms of the manor of Marham, £20.15.9: its demesnes, meadow pasture and a mill, in hand, £13.10.6; the profits of court, communibus annis, 13s 4d; and farms from lands in Norfolk, £2.6.0 and in Suffolk, £1.15.8. Four rents were paid to superior lords amounting to 17s 10d, the fee of the steward was 6s 8d and of the bailiff £2. But this was an unusually simple example, as may be seen by comparing it with Ankerwyke, a small nunnery in Buckinghamshire. The gross value of Ankerwyke was £45.14.4. and its only spiritual revenue was the tithe of its own demesne. The nuns received £7.7.6. from two manors at farm in Middlesex, and £1 from one manor at farm in Essex, 16s 2d from courts and £1.13.4. from sale of woods, and they held rents in London, Windsor, Middlesex, Buckinghamshire, and Surrey. They paid three rents amounting to £3.7.6., the fees of the steward, £1., and the bailiff, £3.6.8. and the chaplain's stipend, £6.(15)

The larger nunneries, especially in London and the south of England, usually held possessions scattered over several counties and this must have made the administration of their revenues very complex. Dartford in Kent held lands in Kent, Surrey, Norfolk, Suffolk, Wiltshire, Wales and London. (16) The Minoresses without Aldgate held property in London, Hertfordshire Kent, Berkshire, Staffordshire, Derbyshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Norfolk and the Isle of Wight. (17) The great abbey of Sion held property of many kinds in twelve counties, including Lancashire and Cornwall. (18)

(14) III.379.
(15) IV. 222.
(16) I. 119.
(17) I. 397.
(18) I. 404.
The scanty information which can be obtained suggests a considerable degree of variation in the methods by which the nunnery revenues were administered. The nuns of Rusper, Sussex, solved the problem in the simplest fashion possible: all the revenues and profits together with profits of court were let to T. Sherley and T. Mychell by indenture for a term of years for £40 a year, out of which they only had to pay the bishop's visitation fee, 5s 5d. (19) There was no other case in which this was done. Most of the houses fall into one of two groups. The London houses, except Sion, and a number, chiefly, of the smaller nunneries scattered throughout the country had a single staff of officials, steward, bailiff, auditor, receiver; their revenues were drawn from scattered rents and other profits rather than from entire manors. There seem to have been about 40 houses of this type in addition to the London houses. The second group comprises the great country nunneries in the south of England, including Sion, and a number of smaller houses whose revenues were reckoned under the headings of various manors each managed by its own bailiff.

The office of chief steward of the possessions of a nunnery was often held by great men and nearly always by knights or gentlemen. This is not surprising in the case of the greater houses or of those whose reputation exceeded their actual wealth. Henry, lord Daubeney, was steward of Shaftesbury, (20) Sir Thomas Wyatt of Malling, (21) George earl of Salop of Wilton, (22) Mr Thomas Cromwell of Sion (23) and Andrew lord Wyndesore of the Nuns; but it was also true of many of the smaller houses: Cromwell was steward also of Gatesby and Andrew, lord Wyndesore, of Burnham and Aukerwyke, (26) Henry marquis of Dorset of Nuneaton (27).
Sir W. Percy of Hampole, Handale and Thicket in Yorkshire, lord Darcy of Swine and the earl of Derby of S. Mary's, Chester. The fee of the office was often in these cases very small. 6s 8d was a not uncommon sum; and it is probable that only the more dignified and occasional of its functions were actually exercised by its more exalted holders. On the other hand, the fees paid in some cases suggest that the steward was the working official. The steward of Westwood received £1 and the only other official mentioned was a collector who received 2s. The steward of S. Michael's, Stamford, received £2 and the collector £1. The only official mentioned in the case of Goring, Oxfordshire, was a steward, Sir Walter Stonor, knight, who received £1. The nunnery maintained stewards as well as bailiffs in most of the counties in which its scattered possessions lay; their fees varied from £1 to £5.6.8. and though many of them were knights it seems probable that they took an active part in the administration. Stewards whose offices were purely complimentary were not uncommon in the manorial and municipal organization of the sixteenth century and this seems to have been frequently, though not universally true in the case of the nunneries.

A few houses claimed allowance for the fee of an under-steward. Curiously, these were not generally the largest houses: Wilton was the only house of any great wealth that did so and it paid him £2.6.8. Others had a steward of the courts of the monastery and in some cases there is mention of

(28) V. 43, 87, 94.
(29) F. 114.
(30) V. 206.
(31) See the abess of Gostow's letter to Cromwell in 1538 offering him the stewardship, with a fee of 40s a year and 20 or 30 men to do the King service "as Mr Walsc... had in the North!" L. & P. Henry viii, xiii, (1) 441.
(32) V.E. III 272.
(33) IV. 140.
(34) II. 169.
(35) II. 109.
a steward of the hospice. One Christopher Willoughby was steward of the hospice and general receiver at

\[ \text{Wilton and received a fee of £2.16.8. After the dissolution he was awarded £20 a year and arrears since the dissolution by the Court of Chancery in recompense for his office.} \]

The difference between the two sums requires explanation; probably the perquisites of the steward of the hospice were more valuable than the fee actually attached to his office under convent seal.

The staff of Sion may be taken as an unusually complete and elaborate example of the usual system, whose principle appears worked out on a smaller scale, in the case of smaller nunneries. The nuns had in the first place what may be called a central staff: a steward at £3.6.8., a steward of the hospice at £23.15.4., a general receiver at £19.13.4. and an auditor at £8.3.4. Their lands in Middlesex were managed by their steward of Ixworth, Lord Wyndesore, whose fee was £3, a steward of courts at £1 and a bailiff at £2.13.4., who had a separate fee of 13s 4d as bailiff of the chapel of the Angels at Braynford. Their extensive possessions in Sussex were managed by a receiver and a steward of courts for the whole county whose fees were £3 and £2 respectively, by four stewards for various districts with fees from £1.6.8. down to 13s 4d and by 13 bailiffs arranged under the Stewards, of whom one received £2.3.4. and the rest from £1 to 6s 8d. Their one manor in Cambridgeshire was managed by a steward at 13s 4d and a bailiff at £1. With the central staff was reckoned a receiver for Somerset, Dorset and Devon, whose fee was £6.13.4.; the ladies held no temporalities in Somerset; in Dorset they had a chief steward, £1.6.8, a steward of courts, 6s 8d and a bailiff, 11s. and their large possessions in Devon were managed by two stewards (£2, 1es 4d), two stewards of courts (13s 4d, 6s 8d), six bailiffs with fees ranging from 4s to £2 and an auditor, 3s 4d. They received £100 a year from unspecified holdings in Lancashire and had there a steward of courts at £1. Their possessions in Lincolnshire were mainly spiritual but they employed a receiver whose fee was 13s 4d. In Gloucestershire they had large possessions.
The two chief stewards of Cheltenham received each £3.6.8. and the chief steward of Wymehynhampton £2. Two stewards of courts each received £1.6.8. and the two stewards at Slaughter £1. Three bailiffs received £2.13.4., £2 and 13s 6d, and with livery. A bailiff/receiver of profits arising from the sale of woods was paid £4 and the steward of the abbey of Cirencester was paid 6s 8d for holding the abbess's view of frank pledge. In Wiltshire the nuns held a manor and a rectory, and paid £1 to a steward for both; they seem to have been leased. In counties where all their possessions were spiritual they had no local officials; in Somerset both the rectories they held were leased and in Kent, although that is not stated, it is suggested by the round sums which were received (£26.13.4, £10, £20). The leasing of property for a fixed sum of course made the administration of it very much simpler. All the temporalities of the Nuns of Aldgate were leased and their staff consisted of a chief steward, Lord Wyndesore, whose fee was £2.13.4, a receiver at £4.5.10 and an auditor at 13s 4d.

About eleven of the nunneries described in the Valor have no entry with regard to the fees of officials. In one case, that of Armavithaite, Cumberland, it can be established from the Receivers' Accounts that the prioress did employ a bailiff and collector, though as his fee was only 13s 4d it is probable that only a part of his time was given to the nunnery. In the cases of Swardley and Gatesby, in Northants, the negative evidence of the accounts confirms the view that no bailiffs were employed. It would be dangerous to use this a presumptive evidence that the nuns of seven other houses in Yorks, Notts and Cumberland managed their revenues without

(37) V.E. I. 397.
officers, as the returns for the diocese of York are meagre and not so reliable as those for other parts of England. Crabhouse, Norfolk, mentions none, most of its temporalities were leased, but this was not true of Irford, Lincolnshire, whose revenue (£14.15.4) was derived from various small rents in that county and one rectory.

It is now necessary to make some analysis of the revenues, themselves.

The spiritualities of the nunneries consisted mainly of rectories, vicarages and chapels appropriated to the houses. There was also in some cases a revenue derived from oblations at a special shrine and from free-will offerings to the house, but this, if it was accurately shown in the Valor, was so small as to be, as a source of income, negligible. Sion reckoned among its revenues £6.13.4. offerings at the shrine of St. Bridget.

The nuns of Usk, Monmouthshire, received 1s 2d from offerings to images in the parish church of Usk. All other entries relating to offerings applied to them as part of the regular revenues of some appropriated benefice and were therefore of a wholly different character. Four nunneries derived a part of their income regularly from alms of the King paid by the sheriff of the county:

- Buckland Minchin, Somerset: (£6.13.4.) £6.13.4.
- Whiston, Worcestershire: (£10.) £10.
- Cokehill: (£59.19.1.) £2.
- Thetford, Norfolk: (£51.10.4.) £51.10.4.

Thetford also received alms from the abbot of Bury St. Edmunds, £13.16.3. Godstow received £5 "de episcopo Lincolniensi ex almosina data apud Banbury." Among the modest revenues of

(40) See Sa¥ilte, op. cit. pp 44-49.
(41) V.E. III.396.
(42) IV. 78.
(43) V.E. I. 424.
(44) IV. 365.
(45) See e.g. Goring, V.E. II. 205:"Ye Parysche Chyrche of Goryng. Item ye iv offeryng days, 1s. - - Ye Ester Boke ys yeraly valer, 2ls 4d - - yn offeryng pens at massys, yn weddyngs, chyrch gornyng, chytts and for cryoms, communibus annis, 16d.
(46) I.210; III.230; III.282; III.313.
(47) II.191.
the Black Ladies of Brewood (£11.1.6) were reckoned five payments amounting altogether to 8s 6d in the form "de tenia (J. Gyfford, mil: in Chyllngton) de elimosina". Apart from these fixed alms which had probably very much the same character as a rent and were sometimes reckoned in the temporal income, offerings to the houses seem to have been negligible: that is to say, unless the nuns, in making their returns, permitted themselves to underestimate or to ignore what must have been always a fluctuating source of income. As these gifts naturally came to an end with the suppression of the house, their amount cannot be checked, as can sometimes be done, by comparison with the Receivers Accounts.

A source of spiritual income, trifling in its amount, but interesting and difficult in character, was the tithe of the demesne in hand reckoned in certain cases as income. The whole subject of demesne tithe was from a legal point of view extremely complicated. Theoretically monastic demesne paid tithe but numerous orders and houses had been exempted by papal bulls whose validity in England was open to question. As to the nunneries, it is only at long intervals in the Valor that we find any mention of the payment of tithe. In the case of the four houses in Buckinghamshire, however, we find the proper tithe of the demesne reckoned as a spirituality so that exemption from tithe was claimed and the unpaid tithe regularly reckoned as spiritual income. Ankerwyke, Little Marlow and Mursely were Benedictine nunneries and Burnham a house of Augustinian canonesses, neither of which orders seem to have been regularly exempt. This was also the case at Godstow, whose demesne was summed up as "summa dominicalium cum decimis" and at Elstow, whose dissolution survey contains the entry of £2,14.2. much less than a tenth of the value of its demesnes, under the heading "tithe of the premises with tithe of the demaynes of Wyllyshamstede" (an appropriated parsonage).

in the Valor of Shaftesbury and two in that of Tament Kaines, Dorset, the tithe of demesne in the occupation of the abbess there was reckoned among the profits of an appropriated rectory. (53) The question remains as to what was the practice in all the other nunneries which make no mention of demesne tithe. They must either have paid tithe and claimed no allowance for it; or have reckoned their gross income for demesne as being that income minus tithe; or assumed exemption for tithe and ignored the whole subject. That they paid tithe and made no attempt to secure allowance for it on the net income is scarcely conceivable for in a small number of cases when allowance was claimed for the tithe on certain small parcels of land not of the demesne it was passed apparently without question. It is also very improbable that the gross income was reckoned minus tithe. If it were it would lose something of its value as it would be impossible to regard it as a genuine gross income at all. But in the cases in which the demesnes were surveyed in detail it is scarcely possible that any such process could have been concealed, apart from the difficulty of assigning a motive to it. There remains therefore the alternative, that nearly all the nunneries in England assumed exemption from the payment of demesne tithe and made no mention of it in their returns. In a number of cases, as Professor S... points out, this would come about naturally as the house held the rectory to which tithe was due and could without comment drop the payment of tithe by itself as landholder to itself as rector, but in the case of the nunneries this was by no means universally true.

At the end of the survey of the abbey of Malling, Kent, after the calculation of the net income occurs the following note:

Malling Appropriata monasterio de Mallyng. Sir Henry Flechervicar ther hath a prebendary out of the monas- tery --- valued by estimation by --- commissioners of the King to the yearly value of £12,18.0 or else the tithes of the dominical lands tam minores quam majores prout in veteribus scriptis apparat. (54)

(53) Shaftesbury, I. 276; Tament, I. 265.
(54) I. 106.
The rectories both of East and West Malling were appropriated to the abbey which therefore owed demesne tithe to itself. Apparently the payment was maintained as a convenient definition of the sum due to the vicar.

The main spiritual income of the nunneries was derived from appropriated benefices and portions of benefices, and from pensions paid by other religious houses, or incumbents. The relative proportions may be suggested by some examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Gross Income</th>
<th>Gross Spiritual Income</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SHEPPEY</td>
<td>(55)</td>
<td>£171.2.8</td>
<td>£55.7.8</td>
<td>Farms of 4 parsonages £54.1.0, and offerings in a chapel £1.6.8.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MALLING</td>
<td>(56)</td>
<td>£295.10.2</td>
<td>£49.9.8</td>
<td>Rectories £44.13.4, and portions of tithe £41.6.4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CANNINGTON</td>
<td>(57)</td>
<td>£69.17.0</td>
<td>£16.15.3</td>
<td>Comprising a rectory, a vicarage and a free chapel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HALIWELL</td>
<td>(58)</td>
<td>£347.1.8</td>
<td>£23.10.0</td>
<td>£5 and one rectory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GODSTOW</td>
<td>(59)</td>
<td>£518.5.11</td>
<td>£96.2.0</td>
<td>Rectories and tithes £31.6.8, pensions £9.12.4, alms £5.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGORBURY</td>
<td>(60)</td>
<td>£75.7.4</td>
<td>£22.17.0</td>
<td>Some tithes and the farms of 4 rectories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLLESWORTH</td>
<td>(61)</td>
<td>£115.18.4</td>
<td>£49.5.0</td>
<td>Pensions £23.8.3 and farms of 2 rectories £26.18.4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARROW</td>
<td>(62)</td>
<td>£84.12.0</td>
<td>£24.11.8</td>
<td>5 rectories £21.18.4, a portion of tithe £1.10.0, a pension £1.3.4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUNCOTON</td>
<td>(63)</td>
<td>£42.14.7</td>
<td>£12.3.4</td>
<td>A rectory £9 2 portions £2.10.0, 2 pensions 13s 4d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELSTOW</td>
<td>(64)</td>
<td>£328.1.10</td>
<td>£185.4.4</td>
<td>11 rectories £157.6.8, 11 portions of tithe £10.2.1, 4 pensions £6.13.4, and the offering at Elstow £1.2.3.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References:
- (55) V.E. I. 77.
- (56) I. 106.
- (57) I.
- (58) I. 597.
- (59) II. 191.
- (60) III. 178.
- (61) III. 77.
- (62) III. 305.
- (63) IV. 75.
- (64) IV. 188.
The bulk of the spiritual income of the nunneries throughout the country was therefore derived from parochial revenues appropriated and the holding of entire rectories predominated over that of scattered portions of spiritual revenue.

The collection of these spiritual revenues must generally have been a complicated business, derived as they were largely from tithes paid in kind and paid as a rule none too willingly. In some cases the nuns apparently employed a bailiff of a rectory to manage the revenues; in the majority of cases probably they fell within the province of the general receiver; there is at any rate no mention of a special bailiff. Where the house was small and the spiritualities came from the rectory of the parish in which it stood, the prioress may have managed them herself. But in a considerable number of cases the whole problem was solved by leasing rectories with all their profits to a layman who held them at a fixed rent for a term of years. In some cases this is explained in full: "dimissa -- pro termino annorum per indenturam." In a number of others the word "firma" or "farm" is used of the income derived from the benefice and the meaning is almost certainly that of a lease. The total spiritual revenue of the 84 nunneries holding spiritualities of which particulars are given in the Valor was £2,705. 17. 5. Of these spiritualities to the value of £1,075. 0. 6. belonging to 33 houses were entered as being at farm, practically the whole sum being received for rectories and chapels. The farming of spiritual revenues was a fairly usual practice in the case of all religious houses; it seems likely to have been more than usually prevalent in the case of nunneries revenues owing to the particular difficulties in the management of such income by the nuns. The assimilation of tithes to ordinary rents had begun and the lay rector was a familiar figure in many parishes before the confiscation of monastic property left the tithes as merely a form of that property in the hands of the crown.
Among the allowances granted from the gross income were entered the pensions or stipends paid to the vicars who served appropriated churches. The number of vicars mentioned does not by any means correspond with that of the appropriated rectories. In some cases a nunnery which held several appropriated rectories apparently supported vicars in only one or two of them; in some no mention was made of any vicars at all. This is particularly frequent in the case of houses which farmed their spiritualities though it is not invariable in their case nor confined to them. In their case it probably means that the payment of stipends was stipulated for in the agreement made with the farmer, as appears in the very interesting Dissolution inventory of Davington, Kent, where the farmer's payment was reckoned "over and above the Curat's wage and all other charge -- and the Curate to be admitted at the prioresse assignement." (66) The nunnuries in Warwickshire and Worcestershire almost without exception farmed their rectories and generally they made no entry in the Valor as to the stipend of any vicar. On the other hand, Carrow, Norfolk, held five rectories all of which were farmed, and paid stipends of £2.13.4. each to two of the vicars. (67) Lacock, Wilts, held three rectories and paid the vicar of Lacock £1; the two others were farmed and no mention is made of the vicars. (68) Westwood, Worcestershire, received £12.12.10 the income of two rectories in hand and paid to a deacon in one of them 11s 4d. (69)

In the whole of this subject it is impossible either to generalize or to classify in any really satisfactory way. There does not seem, for example, to have been any approach to a fixed relation between the income drawn from a rectory and the stipend paid to the vicar. The following examples will serve mainly to demonstrate this absence of any visible principle.

(66) Exch: Almg: Off: Misc: Bks, 154, fo. 67. Davington did not survive until the Suppression but its property escheated to the Crown by the disappearance of the Community in 1535. See below, Chap. iii.

(67) V.E. III 305.

(68) II. 115.

(69) III.276.
(70) S. Sepulchre's, Canterbury, received £2.10.0. from the predial tithe of S. Mary Bredne and paid the vicar £5.
(71) Dartford held 2 rectories in Wilts and Surrey and no mention is made of a vicar's stipend.
(72) Minchen Barowe received from Barowe parsonage £8.14.0. and paid £4 to a chaplain who probably served the parish as well as the convent.

No vicars were mentioned in the Valor of Tament Kaines which received £15.4.0. from three parsonages, nor in that of Shaftesbury which received £72.11.2. from two.

(75) Haliwell, London, received £25.10.0. from the rectory of Trumpington, Cambridge, out of which they paid pensions to 5 religious houses and certain alms, but nothing was said about a vicar.

(76) The Minoresses without Aldgate held 4 rectories: from that of Potton, Beds, they received £16.6.8. and paid the vicar £2; from that of Kessinglond, Norfolk, £9 and paid the vicar £2.4.4.

(77) Studley, Oxon, received from Beckley rectory £6 and paid the vicar there £8.

(78) Canonleigh, Devon, received £5.16.10 from the rectory of Sampford Ampdel and paid the vicar £6; they also held another rectory worth £8.10. and no vicar appears.

(79) Campsey, Suffolk, received £34.5.0. from 4 rectories at farm: £14.2.0. came from Pistre and the vicar there was paid £3: £7.3.4. from Totyngton and the vicar received £5.6.8.

(80) Stixwold, Lincolnshire, held 6 churches and received from them £32.16.8; £9 came from Stixwold and the vicar was paid £8; £10 from Waynfleet Mare and the vicar was paid £8.15.4.

(70) I. 29. (75) I. 394. (80) IV. 37
(71) I. 119. (76) I. 897.
(72) I. 185. (77) II. 172 & 186.
(73) I. 265. (78) II. 328
(74) I. 276. (79) III.415
Elstow, Beds, held 11 rectories from which they received £107.6.8: the nuns only paid the stipends of 4 vicars and the total of the four was £6.6.8.

Wallingwells, Notts, held 2 parsonages of which one Camsalle, Yorks, brought them £56.14.0: they paid the vicar £16.13.4. and a deacon £1.6.8.

The vicar of Deysborough touched the water mark in the matter of his stipend which was 20s, but then the gross income of the nuns of Rothwell was the £10.10.4, they received from that rectory.

On the whole, such evidence as the cold figures of the Valor provide tends to suggest that parochial responsibilities sat lightly upon the shoulders of the nuns and that appropriated rectories were probably a source of income to them and little more.

Part of the revenues of many monastic houses was held in trust and the right of the religious over it was mainly or entirely one of administrative control. In a larger number of cases, property was held on condition of the performance of certain specified functions, usually the performance of services for the soul of the benefactor perpetually, or the distribution of certain alms, or both. These inevitable payments were allowed for in the calculation of net incomes and so were described in the Valor. It is perhaps hardly necessary to point out that as only the purely compulsory alms had a place in the Valor, no material is found there for estimating the value of the voluntary alms given by the nuns. Such necessary alms were administered by 41 nunneries described in the Valor, to the yearly value of £220.0.11. Chantries were maintained and anniversaries celebrated by 15 houses and their total value was £185.0.0.

The nature of the alms varied to some extent with every case, but the following are examples of types which frequently reappear:

(81) IV. 188
(82) V. 179.
(83) IV. 302.
S. Sepulchre's, Canterbury, paid 6s 8d for one quarter of wheat to be given for the soul of William Calwell, their founder, the Thursday next before Easter.

Dartford was allowed £5.12.6. "pro sustentacione et in elimosina data bis qualibet septimana xii. pauperibus ex antiqua consuetudine monasterii."

Shaftesbury, among other alms; £3.6.6. "in elimosina pro sustentacione xii. pauperum apud Bradford orantiam pro fundatoribus monasterii."

Haliwell, London: 18s 6d "in denariis pauperibus ad festum navitatis Domini — pro animabus Henrici quondam Lincolnensis episcopi et parentium suorum."

Wilson: "in annua eleccione xiii. pauperum Magdalene in elimosina ad orandum pro animabus fundatorum monasterii et progenitorum illustrissimi domini Regis."


Runceton: "pro certis quarteriis datis septimanis pauperibus et debilitibus ad portam monasterii ad xii. d. per septimanam per ordinacionem fundatrixis," £2.12.0; "pro quadam elimosina in Cena Domini in denariis nummeratis, pane, cervisia, et allei per fundacionem pauperibus et debilitibus infra monasterium," £2.5.4.

Pollesworth: "data in Cena Domini ad lotiumum pedum pauperibus in pane, potu et victualem ex fundacione," £1.6.0.

The commissioners conscientiously disallowed all claims for abatement on account of trust money which did not benefit anyone outside the community. Claims were sometimes put in on account of sums devoted by the will of some benefactor to the provision of oil, wine, etc, for the convent church, or to be distributed among the nuns, and these were invariably cancelled. Thus at Campsey appears the entry of claims:

(91) III.77.
(92) III.415.
(84) I. 29.
(85) I. 119.
(86) I. 376.
(87) I. 304.
(88) II. 109.
(89) II. 115.
(90) III. 76.

-39-
"in denariis distributis vi. monialibus abbathie viz. priorisse, sacriste, camerarie, elemosinarie, celarie, fermanio," £10.

"in denariis distributis xx. Monialibus in abbathia ex antiqua consuetudine," £8.15.4.

None of these were passed by the Commissioners. On the same principle, no allowance was made with a few exceptions, for the stipend of the convent chaplain. The salaries paid to chaplains of chantries were unusually uniform throughout the country; practically all of them were between £4 and £7 and the sum most commonly paid was £5.6.8.

Turning to the larger and more important temporal revenues, we certainly find the evidence of the nunneries strongly corroborative of Professor Savine's impression that manors predominated over separate holdings in the monastic estates. Among the larger houses, the only exceptions were six of the London nunneries whose revenues lay largely within London and its suburbs. The seventh London house, Sion, belonged by the character of its revenues rather to the class of the rich country nunneries of which Shaftesbury was the typical example. In the case of the small houses there is rather more difficulty; often there is no mention of a manor but in many of these cases it is almost impossible to believe that the holding was not a manor where "redditus assise", demesne lands, profits of court, and perhaps woods or a mill, in the same place, were returned as belonging to the house. Cornworthy, Devon, may be regarded as the pure type of the small agricultural nunnery; all its temporal revenue except two rents bringing in 14s 8d was the income of its own manor of Cornworthy.

(94) V.E. II. 366.
A number of entries, generally insignificant in value but interesting in nature and form, may be grouped together, as they generally are in the Valor, under the heading "profits" of courts. None of them occur in the entries for Staffordshire, Derbyshire, Worcestershire, Leicestershire or Salop, in one only of the ten houses in Lincolnshire and in one only of the sixteen surveyed houses in Yorkshire. The only houses which derived any large income from this source were Shaftesbury and Sion: Shaftesbury from courts of 24 manors, £135.2.5; of 2 hundreds, £13.16.2 and from a court described as "cur' baron' mon' Shafton" £1.17.7; Sion from courts in six counties £133.7.0. In a few other cases where the income appears to be large in proportion to the gross income this is due to the inclusion of income other than curial in the same total. The inclusion of small miscellaneous sums under the same heading makes it, indeed, impossible to attempt any general estimate of the value of the income from courts from entries so misleading. The most common heading is simply "perquisita curie ibidem communibus annis" but in the cases in which more detail is given the variety of the formulae only increases a sense of the perilous vagueness of the phrase. A few examples will demonstrate this:

(97) Malling, Kent. Proficua visus paes epli et aliarum curiarum.


(99) Buckland Minchen, at Shylborne. Perquisita curie ibidem 3s 4d et alia casualia cum finibus tetricum, 16s 8d.

(100) Tarent Kaines, Dorset, at Kayneston. Proficua curie ibidem, viz. in finibus herietta(?) et alia perquisitis communibus annis.

(101) Sion. De perquisitis curiarum et aliorum amerciamentorum ... (followed by a list of places).

(95) V.E. I. 276.
(96) I. 424. Middlesex, Sussex, Cambridgeshire, Dorset, Devon, Gloucestershire.
(97) I. 106. (100) I. 265
(98) I. (101) I.
(99) I. 210. -41-
Amesbury, Wilts, at Kentbury. In perquisitis ii turnorum et ii curiarum baronum sum certis finibus herieta(?) et aliis pertinentibus c.a. £1.6.8.

Goring, Oxon. Fynes and amercements yn ye priores' courts, 2s.

Polalo, Devon, at Toddheys. Be perquisitis curiarum, finibus tenarum, ferleniis relevii, redditibus censia, vendiciones bosci, c.a. £1.5.0.

Canonleigh, Devon; at Rockebear. Perquisita curiarum, pannagium porcorum, redditus pasture bosci, vendiciones bosci, c.a. £12.10.9.

In the cases of Nuneaton and Pollesworth, Warwickshire, the income from courts was again coupled with that from woods. In the midland and eastern counties generally, the phrase "perquisita curiarum" only is found. All the houses in Norfolk and Suffolk except four had entries under this head, usually of a few shillings only; at Brueyard the sum fell to 8d, at Campsey it rose to £4.16.11. The Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire houses all had small entries, ranging from 1s to £2.

In all these cases, the terms in which the entries were made are a more reliable matter of interest than the actual sums received. The revenue from such sources varied from year to year and the constantly recurring phrase "communibus annis" reminds us that the form of the Valor required the statement of an annual average by landholders interested in keeping the total of their income as low as possible. The income from courts and casual payments could not be checked by the assessment of neighbours in the same way as other kinds of income and it is here if anywhere that the monastic houses permitted themselves a little juggling with the figures in compiling their returns.

(102) II. 93.
(103) II.205.
(104) II.318.
(105) II.328. Some of these phrases may have been incorrectly expanded or punctuated.
(106) III.76,77.
(107) III.442.
(108) III. 415.
(109) IV. 188 sqq.
With the income from courts may be noted the sums derived from markets and fairs and other small rights. Such entries are few and scattered. The nuns of Tament Kaines had £2 from the fair at Woodburyhill and those of Shaftesbury £2.4.6. from Shaftesbury Fair. Malling market and fair were worth £3.6.8. to the nuns there who also received £8 from a market "cum terris et tenantis" at Newheth. The nuns of Blackborough, Norfolk, had £1 from Blackborough Fair and those of Elstow £7.12.0. from Elstow Fair. Under Goring occurs the entry "Ye feryage money at Goring wharff wt ye myll ther, 6s 8d." About 40 mills were entered in the Valor of the nunneries, the property of 24 houses. The exact nature of the revenue derived from them is difficult to determine. About a dozen of them were stated to be "at farm" and six or seven are either stated or assumed to be "in hand". The rest were either entered simply as "mills" or with the addition of the word "redditua" in which cases it is possible, though not proven that the income is of the same nature as in the case of mills in hand, viz., that it represents tolls taken on the grinding of tenants' corn. One mill, the property of Malling, was a fulling-mill; of many there is no statement as to their use but the presumption is that nearly all of them were corn-mills. The income drawn from them is uncertain as in many cases some lands or other rights were entered with the mills. Thus Stratford-at-Bow received £13.6.8. from the farm of a watermill with two tenements, Godstow £6.0.0. from that of a watermill and fishery, Cokehill 19s "de redditu" of a water-mill with pasture. The value of individual mills naturally varied very considerably. On the one hand was a mill in Skulthorpe which brought in 5s per annum to the nuns of Thetford; on the other, the mill on the great manor of Barton was worth £5.6.8. to Shaftesbury.

The bulk of the temporal revenue of the nunneries was made up of rents paid by tenants upon freehold, copyhold, customary and leasehold lands or 'holdings at will, and of these rents the majority were paid upon agricultural land. Twenty-two nunneries reported urban tenements in fifteen towns, amounting in total value to £1,976.0.7. Of this sum £969.11.10 was held by the seven houses in London. It may be that the sum should be slightly increased in their case; it is probable that some at any rate of the holdings reckoned under the heading of Middlesex were really urban in character. Sion for example held, according to the Valor, £2,13.4. of the farm of tenements in London but under the heading "Redtitus et Firme, Middlesex" was £115.15.8., some at least of which probably lay in the suburbs of London. (122)

It remains generally true that the greater part of the nunery rents were drawn from agricultural land. This, unfortunately, is the only general statement that can be made about them on the evidence of the Valor. It was in rare cases only that the kind of rent was intelligibly described. Generally speaking the name of the manor was given and followed by the words "Redtitus Assise" which might of course describe either freehold or customary rents. In the case of scattered tenancies the usual heading was "Redtitus et Firme" which could not well be less illuminating. Even where a distinction seems to have been made between "rents" and "farms" it is not always safe to assume that the word "farm" indicates a lease though probably it is usually so; but the distinction was not made often enough to provide a safe basis for generalization. The returns for the Valor gave detail where it was necessary, in the enumeration of the exact sums received and paid and the names of the lands and holdings concerned; they usually ignored the question, now far more interesting, as to the kinds of rent which these sums represented and the relative importance of different kinds of rent in the monastic revenues. Thus the records of the largest item in the nunery budget are perhaps the least fruitful and illuminating to the student of economic history.

(122) I.424.
The rents of Dartford, Kent were described in considerable detail. £36,16.0. was derived from "redditus assises" in Kent, Wiltshire and Wales. From farms of lands in Kent, Suffolk, Wales and London, £220,12.8. including demesne at farm £26,16.4. From farms of 10 manors in Kent, Surrey, Wiltshire, Norfolk and Suffolk, £178,16.8. Certain entries were made as to special tenements:

- £5,14.7: "de redditus per copiam terrarum et communality in comitatu Wilti ad voluntatem domine vocatorum smallands."
- £6,11.11: "de redditus per copiam ... ad voluntatem domine vocatorum yerdlands."

The total gross temporalities of Dartford were £404,11.1. The description is unusually full but it cannot be regarded as typical; the proportion of farms is abnormally high. In a number of the small midland nunneries there is no mention of farms even by the use of the general phrase "rents and farms".

The only assertion that can be made with any approach to confidence is that the income from the freehold rents was probably very small. In the case of six nunneries freehold rents were separately entered and in those cases, therefore, it is likely that no free rents were included under the general headings.

- (184) Shaftesbury: gr. income £1,218, 6. 0, free rents £4. 5. 0.
- (125) Amesbury: " 558,10. 2. " 34. 0. 0
- (126) Godstow: " 318. 5. 11. " 7,10.10
- (127) Canonleigh: " 215. 6. 6. " 2. 6
- (128) Werkyate: " 146. 4. 11. " 4. 5
- (129) York, S. Clement's: " 53.19. 5. " 3.18. 7

The total of the rents thus mentioned is £42,18.4 and the gross income of the six houses £2,510.12.11.

The entries of rents paid by the nuns for which they claimed allowance from the tenth are almost as unsatisfactory.
The sums paid and the name of the lord or the court to which they were due were generally stated but only occasionally did the returns provide any further detail. With the rents may be noted a number of fines and other miscellaneous payments, usually very small. The heading was usually "Resolutiones Redditi" or in English "Rents Resolute" and the typical form - "(name of lord or court) pro terms et tenementis in ..." A few examples may be given of other payments entered. Breeceboro paid to the sheriff of Sussex "pro geldo sanc" 4d. S. Sepulchre's, Canterbury, to the sheriff of Kent for "lathysqlven" 7d. S. Helen's, Bishopsgate, and Clerkenwell paid 17d and 23d respectively to the sheriff of London for socage of the lord King. Polalo, Devon, on the manor of Cockkyspitte "domino Regi ad turnum Vicemcitia pro auxilio domini Regis" 4d. Amesbury to the bailiff of the hundred of Amesbury for "tithingpenny and reawmone(?)" 5s 6d. There were a good many claims on account of fines paid to certain courts "pro secta relaxanda" such as the fine of 2s paid to the sheriff of Gloucester by Godstow, which held certain tenements in Gloucester and a few on account of payments such as that of Brayford, 2d, "duci Norrœ castro suo de Framlyngham." It remains to describe, so far as may be, the revenue drawn by the sums from their own demesnes. Here the evidence of the Valor is as ambiguous and variable as anywhere and the detail, when it is given, is by far more interesting than the totals are for statistical purposes reliable. Sometimes the site of gardens were expressly included in the demesne valuation; sometimes they were mentioned and valued at nil "quia reservata ad usum dicti conventus"; often they were not mentioned at all. There was

(130) V.E. I. 323.  (134) II. 93.
(131) I. 89.  (135) II. 101.
(132) I. 392 & 393.  (136) III. 442.
(133) II. 315.  (137) e.g. Greenfield, Lincolnshire, V.E. IV. 65.
(138) e.g. Rothwell, Northumt, IV. 302.
(139) e.g. Hampole, Yorks, V.E. V. 43; Vis' Compt' 31-32 Henry viii Augm. Off: Misc: Bks. 307, fo. 06; Haedale, V.E. V. 07: Augm. Off: Misc: Bks. 401, fo. 21, Easholt, V.E. V. 16: Augm Off: Misc: Bks 401, fo. 09.
usually no attempt to value rights of common pasture which were very seldom mentioned. In many cases the word "demesne" alone was used without any indication whether it was in hand or farmed; and in some the valuation in the Valor was seriously at variance with that of the survey made at the Suppression. (139)

The first question which suggests itself in this connection, "to what extent did the nuns in 1535 farm their demesnes?" cannot be confidently answered on the evidence or any of the records before us. Apart from the fact that in many cases there is no statement at all, the word "firma" or "farm" is used so ambiguously that even where it occurs it is impossible to be certain that a lease existed. In the Paper Surveys the phrase "firma dominicalium" was used in several cases to describe the revenue from demesne in hand and it seems to have been used in this sense in the Valor of Dartford "de firma ... dominicalium occupatorum et reservatorum ad usum monasterii"; the Paper Survey of Dartford confirms the impression that these lands were in hand. There are of course unmistakable cases in which demesnes were farmed: Kent Kaines kept in hand the demesnes of 3 manors and farmed that of 7: Shaftesbury occupied the demesne of one manor and farmed that of 18. (141) But in none of the few cases in which the whole of the demesne is described as yielding a "firma" should we be justified, in view of the several uses of the word, in asserting that it had the definite character of a lease. That is to say, whatever may be our suspicions, the evidence before us does not warrant the assertion that in a single case did the nuns farm the whole of their demesnes: and this conclusion is an unexpected and remarkable one, for we might well expect them to be among the first landlords who seized this method of simplifying their manorial economy.

(141) I. 285.
(142) I. 276. In the case of Wilton, which drew an income of £162.12.0. from demesne farms, they were nearly all paid
The great distinction between demesne in hand and at farm may, however, be left behind when we look for the detail as to the demesne lands themselves, for, in the Suppression Surveys at all events, descriptions of the lands probably had to be sent in whether they were in hand or farmed and often the surveyor did not mention which was the case. In the Valor surveys of demesnes in more or less detail were given in the case of 13 nunneries and demesne surveys made at the Suppression have been studied in the case of 21 others. Both the Valor and the Surveys often conceal the very facts which are most interesting under a display of comparatively worthless detail. In the case of about 14 houses and about 610 acres of arable it may be asserted pretty confidently that the arable was enclosed; in the case of about 2,200 acres, the property of 13 houses that it was unenclosed.

In that of the remaining nunneries where it is entered simply as "arable" with the number of acres and the annual estimated value, open land probably predominated. Two nunneries appear in both lists: Goring, Oxfordshire, had 77 acres certainly enclosed, 17 acres certainly open; Nunappleton, Yorkshire, had 112 acres enclosed, 26 acres open. The localities may be seen in the following tables:

1. Arable certainly Enclosed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Number of Nunneries</th>
<th>Acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lincolnshire</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumberland</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Arable certainly Open.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Number of Nunneries</th>
<th>Acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lincolnshire</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norfolk</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huntingdonshire</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warwickshire</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herefordshire</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northants</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedfordshire</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The value of arable does not appear from the surveys either in the Valor or at the Suppression to have varied much, whether it was enclosed or not. Arable in the common fields was reckoned at from 4d to 6d an acre though 30 acres "in campis" at Stainfield was

(142) Continued in kind and this was probably the case elsewhere, where the relative brevity of the Survey conceals it. See V.E. II. 109 & Savings, Oxford Studies, I, pp. 163-5.
valued at 8d an acre, 221 acres, unspecified arable, at Markyate, Bedfordshire, at 9d an acre and 54 acres at Amkerwyke at 1s. Enclosed arable was worth about the same. Nunapleton held 50 acres at 6d and 20 acres at 4d: 10 acres in one close at Handale were valued at 3s 4d: 60 acres in 6 closes at Kirk-lees at £1.6.s. On the other hand 30 acres in 4 closes at Ellerton, also a Yorkshire house, were valued at £2.10.0. and 26 acres in 6 closes at Armathwaite, Cumberland, at £1.6.0.

Enclosed pasture appears unmistakably in the surveys of 20 nunneries to the extent of about 1,544 acres. The distribution of this number was as follows:

- Oxfordshire: 2 houses, 245 acres
- Lincolnshire: 1 house, 86 acres
- Yorkshire: 11 houses, 874 acres
- Cumberland: 1 house, 40 acres
- Warwickshire: 1 " 203 acres
- Herefordshire: 1 " 23 acres
- Northants: 1 " 71 acres
- Bedfordshire: 2 houses, 212 acres

In one case only, that of 3 acres at Merkyate, Bedfordshire, is the description "de novo pasturata" added and the 3 acres valued at 10s. The value of enclosed pasture showed a greater variety than that of arable. Six closes, containing 71 acres at Delapre, Northampton, were valued at £4.19.0. 181 acres at Elstow, Bedfordshire, at £9.12.0. and 165½ acres at Fun-monkton, Yorks, at £7.16.8. On the other hand, at Acornbury, Herefordshire, one close was valued at 6d an acre and 103½ acres at £1.7.4: 107 acres in 9 closes at Kirklees were valued at £2.16.2 and 29 acres in 3 closes at Handale at 14s 4d.
The general impression is that arable was usually worth about 6d an acre, so enclosed pasture was usually worth about 1s, though there were considerable individual variations. Rights of common were very seldom mentioned. Swyne, one of the few north-country nunneries whose arable was still, apparently, all in the open fields, had common for 60 beasts in Swyne and valued the right at 10s and another common-right for 24 beasts at 2s.\(^{(166)}\)

The value of meadows, though usually higher, varied in some cases still more considerably. In the Valor of Godstow, seven meadows were entered as part of the demesnes, containing 69 acres. All were said to lie in peril of flood. Their value varied from 1s 6d to 2s 4d an acre; one, which was common after Michaelmas was valued at 2s an acre and two others, common after the first mowing at 1s 8d.\(^{(187)}\) The 20 acres of meadow held by Legbourne, Lincolnshire, submerged in winter, were worth only 1s an acre. Sixty acres at Stainfield were worth 8d an acre,\(^{(158)}\) and 63 acres there, "aqua superundata," 4d an acre.\(^{(159)}\) At the other end of the scale stood the meadows of Nastyate, Bedfordshire, where 9 acres in hand were valued at 6s 8d an acre and 8 acres leased brought in £2,13.4.\(^{(160)}\) The standard value for meadow was about 2s an acre but the individual variations were greater and more frequent than in the case either of arable or of\(^{(156)}\) pasture.

Considering the economic situation of the nunneries in general, the chief impression remains one of smallness of scale. If we neglect for a moment the very limited number of the great nunneries, the average is seen to be one of extraordinary poverty, and even the eight or ten houses which loomed largest

\(^{(156)}\) 401, fo. 375.
\(^{(157)}\) V.E. II, 191.
\(^{(158)}\) IV. 52.
\(^{(159)}\) V.E. IV. 82.
\(^{(160)}\) IV. 209.
were in wealth far below the houses of monks of corresponding reputation. In the majority of the houses the life of their little company of inmates would have struck a modern mind with a sense of intolerable squalor. Whether this poverty was a factor leading directly towards the collapse of the system is a question not easy to answer briefly. It was certainly not, in the sixteenth century, a recently developed feature of monastic life. Most of the nunneries had been almost if not quite as poor throughout their history as they were in 1535 and some of them had at former epochs in their life been poorer. In the days of enthusiasm in which the Cistercian or the Franciscan houses had come into being, their meagre endowments had served only to add fuel to the zeal of their inhabitants. The transformation of the character and ideals of the nunneries which had taken place in the two centuries before the dissolution had profoundly modified their attitude in this respect but in the end there was no case in which the poverty of a community was assigned as a direct cause of its decay. Among the nunneries which fell to pieces for various reasons in the forty years just before the dissolution no case occurs in which poverty was clearly an important factor, unless it be the obscure one of S. Radegunde's, Cambridge, although of course the insufficiency of a house would materially help it in slipping out of existence unnoticed. Occasionally the revenues, already small, were diminished by dishonesty in their management and frequently by incompetence, significant of a certain lowness of standard in other ways as well as for their effect upon the poverty of the house; this again was no new feature of the sixteenth century and indeed, so far as available material goes, was on the whole less prevalent than it had been in the preceding century. The debts owing by the houses at their suppression were not in any case at all overwhelming, though the bald lists which are the best surviving records of them are too ambiguous to sustain any

(161) See below, Chapter III.

(162) See Dugdale, Monasticon, IV. p. 215.
important argument. The formal reports made by the commissioners of 1536 have only survived in a limited number of cases but of these only one house, Henewood, Warwickshire, was reported as being "ruinous and in much decay". In the sixteenth century visitations there was occasional mention of buildings said to be "ruinous" but it would be easy to overestimate the significance of the word as it was apparently used to describe any degree of dilapidation. Thus the church porch was said to be ruinous at Blackborough in 1514; at Flixtow in 1526 the cloister and refectory were said to need repair in the roof and in 1532 at Blackborough again the church was described as "ruinosa". The little Sussex houses of Easebourne and Rusper at episcopal visitations in 1521 and 1524 respectively were found to need repairs in their buildings. These are the only cases of "ruin" that have been noticed either in the suppression Certificates of Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Leicestershire, Herts and Sussex or in the sixteenth-century visitations of the dioceses of Norwich, Canterbury, Chichester, Lincoln and York. The evidence does not, therefore, warrant the view that the nunneries were in a condition of economic decay on the verge of the dissolution, nor that their poverty had a direct effect of any importance in producing their fall. Nor is there any particular reason to suppose that the great economic changes which had taken place in the last forty years of their life, or the greater changes which were to follow them would necessarily have a bad effect upon the nunnery revenues. Their property would be very little affected by changes in the value of money as, though it was certainly stationary, it was almost entirely in land. It does not seem on the whole, to have been incompetently managed in the years just preceding the dissolution, though the available evidence on this point is meagre and there were some glaring exceptions. The proportion of enclosed pasture in the nunnery demesnes all

(163) Treasury of the Receipt Miscell: Bks 154, Warwick.
(165) Sussex Archaeological Collections, V.
over England and of enclosed arable in the counties where enclo-
sure had already made most headway in 1535 suggest that the nuns
were not incapable of profiting as their neighbours did by the
agrarian changes. There had been, of course, in the early six-
teenth century a considerable rise in the standard of living
especially in the class of country gentry from which the nuns
were chiefly drawn, and this emphasised the poverty of the
nunneries and created a chasm between the religious and the
secular life which had hitherto been unknown, at any rate since
earlier days of monastic revival. In this way the poverty of
nunneries may have had a relation to the depletion of numbers
which was sometimes noticed in the last years of their life.
If the dissolution had not taken place it is probable that a
few of the poorest and most obscure houses would have slipped
quietly out of existence as Bungay and Davington did in 1535, but
their disappearance would not necessarily have had any direct
connection with their poverty; Bungay and Davington were not
by any means the poorest of English nunneries. On the whole
there seems to have been no reason, judged on purely economic
grounds, why the majority of the English nunneries should not
have weathered the economic changes of the century quite safely;
and if there was an internal decay in the system which made its
collapse inevitable it is in other spheres than the economic
that we must seek it.
PART I.

CHAPTER III.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.
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THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

(A) The decay of 8 nunneries in the 40 years immediately preceding the dissolution.
   (i) S. Radegunde's, Cambridge.
   (ii) Bromhall
   (iii) Littlemore
   (iv) Wix
   (v) Fairwell
   (vi) Pré
   (vii) Davington
   (viii) Bungay

(B) Changes of immorality made against the nunneries.
   (i) Sexual Misconduct
   (ii) Luxury and indolence

(C) Criticism of the authorities on their condition:
   (i) Episcopal visitations
   (ii) Compendium Coepertorum, 1535.
   (iii) Brief Certificates, 1536.

(D) Generalizations as to:
   (i) Sexual disorders
   (ii) Quality of the nunnery life in general.
If there is one which may be said to be central among the many problems arising out of the dissolution of the monasteries it is the question of the extent to which internal forces of decay had already accomplished the downfall which was abruptly completed by Henry VIII. Eight nunneries dropped out of the list during the forty years before 1536; the causes of their disappearance ought to throw some light upon the general question. The records of all their cases are unfortunately very meagre and it would be easy, where so small a number of houses is concerned, to exaggerate their significance; they are nevertheless very instructive and they will be examined in chronological order.

(2) The priory of S. Radegund's, Cambridge, vanished about 1496. John Alcock, Bishop of Ely, finding it in that year greatly dilapidated and forsaken by the nuns, converted it into the college afterwards called Jesus College. Of the causes of the nuns' desertion of the place, nothing is known. They can hardly have been driven by sheer poverty, despite the "dilapidation", or their revenues would not have been worth mentioning as the main foundation of the new college.

(3) Bromhall Priory in Windsor Forest was suppressed in 1521. Henry VIII wrote to the Bishop of Salisbury on December 21 of that year thanking him for the care he had taken in suppressing it "for such enormities as was by them used". A little more information appeared at the Inquisition held at Windsor in March 1522 as to the property of the house. It was found that the prioress Joan Rawyns resigned on September 12, 1521, and that the two nuns who composed the community left the priory "as a profane place". Its lands therefore reverted to the King. The object of its suppression was then made apparent by the grant of its lands to the Master, Fellows and Scholars of S. John's, Cambridge, a foundation of the Lady Margaret's in process of

(2) Dugdale, Monasticon, IV. p. 215.
(3) V.E.H. Berks, ii. 80.
(4) L.& P. iii. 1863.
completion by her executor, John Fisher, bishop of Rochester. In the same year he secured the dissolution of the priory of Lillechurch or Heygham\(^{(5)}\) in Kent. The last prioress died in 1520 and the resignations of the three nuns were taken in 1521. Their revenues were stated to be in great decay and divine service, hospitality and almsgiving to have practically ceased; also that "in angulo quodam sorsum a conspectu populi situs a lascivis personis maxime clericis nimum frequentabatur; cujus occasione Moniales in ibi degentes de incontinenti vita vehementer erant notatae," and in particular that two of them had borne children to Edward Sterope, vicar of Heygham. Some witnesses were heard as to one of them, including a nurse who had taken charge of her baby, and a former servant of the nunnery who had been sent by the bishop to investigate the matter. "Intravit claustrum dicti Prioratus ubi vidit dominam sedentem et plorantem; cui iste Juratus dixit 'Alas, madam, howe happened this with you?' Cui ipsa respondebat "And I had ben happy I myght a caused this thinge to have ben unknownen and hydden.'" The lands of Lillechurch also went to S. John's and its suppression was confirmed by papal bull dated the 4th of the Calends of October, 1524.

Next in order comes the group of nunneries suppressed for the benefit of Wolsey's foundations. \(^{(5a)}\) Littlemore Priory near Oxford, the first of them, dissolved in 1525, had been in a state of great disorder at least since 1517 and indeed most of its history, so far as it is known, seems to have been fairly discreditable. During the last years the prioress and the five nuns formed two violently antagonistic parties, each of which had its own adherents in Oxford. The prioress had had a daughter by one Richard Hewes, a priest in Kent, who still visited her, and she took the pots and candlesticks and other goods of the house for a dowry for her daughter. Another nun was also stated at the visitation of 1517 to have borne a child within the last year by a married man of Oxford. The nuns said that the prioress had pawned nearly all the jewels of the house and that they had neither food, clothing nor stipends: and, rather curiously, that the

\(^{(5)}\) Dugdale IV, 378. \(^{(5a)}\) V.O.H. Oxford, II, 76.
nun was excessively vigorous in her punishments of them. Later, the prioress appeared before the bishop and admitted the charges. Her daughter was then dead. She was deposed but allowed for a time to exercise the functions of the office, and not unnaturally there was no improvement in the order of the house. Nevertheless, when the house was dissolved in February, 1525, she received a pension of £6.13.4. (6) This record speaks for itself but is only fair to add that it is not rivalled by any other monastery. The annual revenues of Littlemore, transferred to Cardinal's College amounted to £35.6.8.

The priory of Wix in Essex was dissolved in March, 1526. (7) Its revenue in spiritualities was £26.16.8. and in temporalities £65.15.7. (8) and as there were only three nuns under the prioress it was probably the combination of small numbers and a comparatively large income which attracted the attention of Wolsey. It is not known that there were any accusations of the graver kind against the ladies of Wix. The convent had been visited by its diocesan, Fitz James bishop of London, in 1509, whose injunctions, though they suggest a suspicion of worldliness were in themselves quite trivial. The prioress, Mary Henyngham was awarded a pension of £10 (10) and the three nuns were transferred to other places.

Still less is known about the priory of Fairwell in Staffordshire which was suppressed in April 1527 and given to Lichfield Cathedral. Its revenues were worth £33.6.8. a year, and the last prioress was called Elizabeth Hilsawe.

The last of the nunneries which went to enrich Wolsey's foundations was the house of S. Mary de Pre, S. Albans. (12) About the inner history of its last years nothing is known, though in 1490 there had been highly scandalous revelations as to the relations of its nuns with some monks of S. Albans. In 1528 the

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(6) L.& P. IV (1) 1139 (9), 1138. (11) Dugdale, Monasticon, IV. 110.
(8) L.& P. IV (1) 1137.
(9) Ibid. 3538.
(10) Ibid. 5117: VI, 228.

-56-
the prioress, Elizabeth Barnarde, died and the three remaining
nuns took their departure. In May of that year, accordingly, it
was dissolved by papal bull and its lands annexed to the abbey of
St Albans, and in July the King granted them to Wolsey for Car-
dinal's College.

Two nunneries vanished only a few months before the Act
of 1536 would have dissolved them. The priory of Davington in
Kent seems to have been deserted in 1535, in which year it was
found before the escheator of the county that neither prioress
nor nuns were left to perform the services. The property of
the house therefore lapsed to the King, who presumably represented
the founder. The house had been visited by Warham in 1511 when
all was well except that one nun made a vague accusation of pecu-
lation against the officers. The prioress exhibited an inventory
and everything seems to have been in good order and no injunctions
were given. (13) In April 1536, the abbot of Feversham who was collector of the King's Tenth
for the diocese of Canterbury applied to Cromwell to be discharged
the £1.6.8. due from the "late" prioress of Davington, which was
not paid as Cromwell's servant had taken an inventory in the
King's name of all the moveable goods there. (14)

The other nunnery dissolved was that of Bungay in Suffolk
about which hangs a considerable amount of mystery. (15) Everything
there was said to be in good order at the last episcopal visita-
tion in 1532 and there were then 6 nuns. Its gross income in
1535 was £71.5.11. (16) Later in that year a letter was written
to Cromwell, apparently by one of his spies, reporting that the

(13) Dugdale, Monasticon, IV, 288.
(14) L.& P. X. 724. But Davington is not to be found in the
"Valor Ecclesiasticus" There is an inventory of its
(15) V.C.H. Suffolk, ii,
(16) Jessopp: Visitations in the Diocese of Norwich.
(17) V.E. iii.430.
The prioreses of Bungay and Buxted with other heads of religious houses, had been buying lands, which by the statute 21 Henry VIII, c. 13, 1539, religious communities were forbidden to do. The next fact known is that "at Saint Andrew's tide" there was not one nun left there and the Duke of Norfolk, representing the founder, entered into possession of its property.

In at least three and probably at least four of these rather obscure cases, those of Littlemore, Bre, Littlechurch and probably Broman, there is suspicion of grave moral disorders, and the consideration of them brings us face to face with the moral charges which were brought against the nunneries at the time of the suppression and which have been repeated in varying forms by writers of various schools ever since. The accusations fall into two distinct classes although the two are often not distinguished. On the one hand are the charges of "immorality" in the almost technical sense of the word, representing sexual immorality; on the other, the vague charges of luxury, indolence worldliness, abuse of trust and slackness in maintaining the more austere obligations of the religious life. The former charge concerns a matter of what may be called public and general interest; the latter comes most appropriately from those who accept the value of the contemplative life. The two were commonly related and have been still more commonly confused, and an attempt must be made to elucidate the whole problem in so far as the materials exist and in so far as the mere enumeration of facts and figures can hope to do so.

The most detailed evidence as to the general life of the nunneries in the sixteenth century is that found in the records of episcopal visitations.

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(18) L.& P. IX. 1084.
(19) L.& P. X. 1236: & see Norfolk's letter to Cromwell, X. 599.

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exist, are undoubtedly the best material for the study of the subject. The visitations were profoundly confidential in nature, the nuns were under a sacred obligation to obey the bishop and to be perfectly open with him, the visitations were made, in practically all cases, before the movement for the dissolution had made it in any sense the interest of the bishop or nuns to conceal disorders and the records, buried in episcopal registers could never (in any case) be used for purposes of party controversy. They approach more nearly to the standing of a disinterested record than any other evidence available on this subject. On the other hand, there were certainly cases in which the head of a house tried to prevent the nuns from making revelations to the bishop, which, as each nun was interviewed by him alone, they were usually quite ready to do: and there may possibly have been other cases in which the concise entry "omnia bene" was due to a successful conspiracy of this kind. Such cases, however, cannot have been frequent, for the bishop’s questions were searching and he was obviously in possession of other information about the house than the "comperta" extracted from the nuns.

Records of episcopal visitations have been studied in the cases of 46 visitations of 21 nunneries during the years 1510-1535, in the dioceses of Canterbury, Chichester, Lincoln, Norwich, Winchester and York. In these houses occurred four clear cases of immorality. At Crabhouse, Norwich diocese, in 1514, although the prioress asserted that all was well, the sisters obedient and religion well observed, others reported that Agnes Smyth, formerly cellaress, had borne a child in the convent and that the child died immediately, and the bishop appointed for Agnes Smyth a penance astonishingly light. At a visitation of Easebourne, Chichester diocese in 1524, it was stated that one Ralph Pratt twelve years before "impregnavit quandam dominam Johannam Covert" and that a grant had been made to him and he still had much access to the priory. In 1527 at a visitation by commissary at Romsey Margaret Dowman confessed misconduct with Thomas Hordes and received a severe penance. In 1534 when Archbishop Lee was holding a visitation of York diocese, he appointed a penance
for Joanne Hutton of Esholt who had borne a child. Some other cases were also suspicious. In the Norwich visitation of 1514 it was said that John Welles was “conversibilis” with the prioress of Flixtone and the bishop enjoined him to remove himself and his goods from the place before November 1 following, for the remainder of the prioress’s life: in 1520 there was a new prioress at Flixtone and some complaints were made that she was too strict. In 1527 at Romsey besides the confession of Margaret Dowman, there was an inconclusive investigation into the conduct of Clemence Malyn, who seems to have admitted Richard Bohans into the church at night and she was removed from the offices she held. At Nuncoton, Lincoln, in 1531, the bishop said that some of the nuns had wandered abroad in the world “whereby hath grown many inconveniences, insolent behaviour and much slander”, and he also gave, without further explanation the names of six knights, gentlemen and priests, who were not to be allowed to enter the priory thenceforth.

The next authority, moving in chronological order, is that of the documents connected with the visitation under Cromwell in the autumn and winter of 1535-6, which were said to have brought about the Act for the suppression of the smaller monasteries. (21) The visitation was entirely novel and without precedent in its nature and probably essentially destructive in its intention, although it may have made some faint-hearted attempt to model itself upon the form of the familiar episcopal visitations. Certainly its records, said to contain information obtained from the religious themselves, were called “comperta” but that is all that is known about them as none of them have

(21) L.& P. X. 364; and see Gairdner, Lollardy and the Reformation, bk iii, chap. i; and Dixon, History of the Church of England, vol. i, Chap. v, p. 541. The MS. used is that at the P.R.O. see Dixon’s description. The entries and suppression “certificates” relating to a few houses were printed by Jessopp in a pamphlet: Norfolk Monasteries at the Time of the Suppression. pp. 32, n.d.
survived, nor is there known to be any record that anyone saw
them at the time. The principal surviving document relating to
this visitation is the celebrated summary entitled "Compendium
Compar torum" which was sent to the Vicar-General as soon as the
visitatio n was completed for the counties with which it deals.
There are also a few letters sent to him by the visitors in the
course of their progress which contain their impressions of
houses not included in the Compendium. The traditional Black
Book, if it ever existed, was presumably a Compendium Compar torum
on a larger scale but on the evidence of the records surviving
there is no reason whatever to suppose that the visitation cover-
ed the whole or the greater part of England so that it could not
in any case have provided a satisfactory explanation of the urgent
necessity for the suppression of the monasteries. The whole of a
record providing a damaging indictment of the monasteries has
been adequately demolished by Gairdner and Dixon, and Dixon has
given a complete account of the document itself. Its character
is extremely formal. In the case of the nunneries the entries
usually consist of a statement in round figures of the annual
value of the house and the name of the representative of the
founder; then, under the marginal heading "incontinentia" are
entered the names of some of the nuns with an exceedingly brief
account of their offence, and under that of "superstitio" any
relics or holy places to which pilgrimage was made. The entry
as to Nunburnholme may be copied as a fair example:

Nunburnholme monialium

Incontinentia - Isabella Thayne peperit
Johanna Lyell cum simplici.
Fundator dominus Dakers. Reditus £8.
Superstitio. Et habent partem Sanctae Crucis.

In some cases only the revenue of the house and the
founder’s name are given. In two, those of Clementhorpe and
Thicket, where there are no entries of incontinence, there are
statements that certain nuns "petunt dimitti a jugo religionis".
This crude summary covers the nunneries of Lincolnshire, Derby-
shire, Yorkshire, Durham, Cumberland, Northumberland, Cheshire,
and Norfolk, containing 35 houses of nuns, and it makes accusa-
tions of incontinence against 41 nuns in 22 houses. In no case
does it mention the number of nuns in the house or allude to
any of them except those so accused. In the case of Norfolk
and of some of the Yorkshire houses it is fortunately possible
to consider its statements in the light of episcopal visitations
very recently held. Under Blackborough, Norfolk, the Com-
pendium enters the names of the prioress and two nuns with the
heading "suspicio de incontinentia". At a visitation held by
the bishop of Norwich in 1532 it was found that the church need-
ed repair but otherwise all was well. At Thetford the Compendium
reported one name "catetur incontinentiam". In 1532 the only
matter which occupied the bishop there was a confusion over a cor-
rodry. At Crabhouse the Compendium reported that the prioress and
three nuns were guilty of incontinence and that two of them had
borne two children. This house had not been visited, so far as
is know, since 1520 when all was said to be well; but in 1514 the
bishop had appointed a penance for Agnes Smyth who had borne a
child. Of the Yorkshire nunneries, Archbishop Lee had visited
in 1534-5 Clementhorpe, Nunappleton, Naburnholme, Sinningthwaite
Kildholme, Moxby and Esholt at least, though injunctions have
been preserved only for five of them. At Sinningthwaite the
Compendium entered that two ladies "pepererunt." The Archbishop's
injunctions included orders to admit no one to the priory "sus-
pectly" and to keep their doors locked at the proper times in
the evening, an injunction which was extremely common. He also
enjoined the prioress not to ill-use her sisters for anything
revealed to him and the sisters not to "gruete" at the prioress.
At Nunappleton, again, the Compendium reported that two "peperer-
unt". The Archbishop's injunctions were entirely concerned with
domestic trifles. At Esholt the Compendium gave three names
under "pepererunt". At the visitation a penance had been appointed

(22) Jessopp: Visitations of the Diocese of Norwich. Lee's
visitations, Yorkshire Archaeological Journal, XVI, pp.
424-458.
for one who had borne a child but her name is not one of those in
the Compendium. There were injunctions also as to placing proper
locks upon the doors and forbidding seculars to be lodged in the
cloister and that no ale-house be kept within the precincts. At
Keldholme and at Moxby the Compendium reported no names under
this heading: at each of them the Archbishop had appointed a
penance for a nun who had "gone into the world", one of them for
a second time. The study of the available detail as to the
nunneries, therefore, certainly supports the opinion that the
Compendium Compterum is totally unreliable although in one or
two cases its witness is partially borne out by other records
which incidentally suggest that even in these cases the Compen-
dium is extremely inaccurate. The question as to the origin
of the statements so listed is less easy to answer. Certainly
the hypothesis of pure invention is a desperate one. (23) Dixon's
description of the character and profession of the men who were
employed as visitors is a more suggestive explanation. (24) It
may perhaps be added to this that they made valuable gleamings
from hostile gossip in the neighbourhood of the religious houses
they visited. The majority of the nunnerys were undeniably un-
popular, as witness the flood of letters asking for a share of
their spoils with which Cromwell was inundated in the early
months of 1536. (25) Generally speaking, the houses of which the
visitors in their letters spoke as in good order were certainly
those which were popular for their hospitality or their charity.
The general public had been taught by popular song and satire for
nearly two centuries what to expect from the professed religious
and unfriendly gossip was immeasurably more outspoken in the
sixteenth century than it is at the present day, as any reader of

(23) Suggested by Jessopp: Norfolk Monasteries at the Time of
the Suppression.

(24) History of the Church of England, Vol.I., Chap. V.,
pp 356-7.

(25) See below, chap. V.

(26) e.g. Godstow & Catesby, L. & P. IX. 457.
Shakespeare can surely realize. It is impossible to read any of the Visitors' letters to Cromwell without realizing that they were seeking evidence of one kind only and it would be entirely natural for them to listen greedily to any scandalous stories or suspicions which might be current in the neighbourhood. The visitation must have been very superficial in view of its extreme rapidity. In addition to the surviving fragments of the Compendium there exist letters of the visitors throwing light upon the condition of about seven other monasteries and making accusations more or less definite against four of them; these can be treated more seriously than the Compendium and will be considered at a later point.

The third class of records throwing light upon the condition of the nunneries on the eve of their suppression are those relating to the survey made before the dissolution of the smaller houses under the Act of 1536. They also, in their surviving state are extremely fragmentary. In most cases the survey and other primary documents are not extant and the only evidence available for more than a very few houses is that of the "Brief Certificates" or summaries sent in to the Court of Augmentations by the commissioners at the earliest possible date after their examination. Such certificates are available for 15 houses of nuns, in Leicestershire, Warwickshire, Hertfordshire, Sussex, Norfolk, Suffolk, Hampshire, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire and the city of Bristol. They report the number of religious

(27) e.g. L.& P. IX.160. "we found nothing at Lacock. The house is well ordered." IX. 708 (concerning some ladies of Denny who begged to be released from their vows) "to avoid calumny it were well they were dismissed upon their own suit -- and that they be not straight discharged when we are here, for then the people will say we came for no other cause.


(30) Suppression Papers Vol. iii.

(31) Printed by Jessopp, Norfolk Monasteries on the Eve of Suppression, Tr: P.R.O. Chantry Certificates, 90, and by Cardinal Gasquet, Dublin Review, April 1894, from Chantry Certificates 90 & 100.
upon oath of the head of the house and their "fame", "report" or "conversation" presumably from external evidence. They also state how many of them wished to have "capacities" dispensing them from the religious life and how many wished to be transferred to other nunneries. All the 20 houses whose certificates have been examined were reported as of good fame except Marham Abbey, Norfolk, where were "religious persones v of slanderous reports" but even of them two wished to continue in religion. In eight houses all the inmates desired to continue in religion. In the remaining 12 were 88 nuns of whom 43 desired to have capacities. The record can be compared with that of the Compendium Compertorum in Norfolk and Leicestershire. At Blackthorpe, Norfolk, the Compendium named the prioress and two nuns as suspected of incontinence; the Certificate contained the entry "religious persones ix. of good name and fame and they all require ther dispensations." At Thetford the Compendium reported that one nun "fatetur incontinentiam"; the Certificate said "religious persones v of gode conversation and lyvynge and they all require ther dispensations" adding the mysterious note "at ye visitation x whereas iii then incontinent", which manifestly cannot refer to the recent visitation under Cromwell if the Compendium is an abridged report of that visitation. At Marham the Compendium made accusations against five ladies and the report of the Certificate was quoted above. At Crabhouse the Compendium names four offenders: the Certificate says "religious persones iii whereof iii of them done require ther Dispensaciones and one will be Religious the name ys goode --- " (32) and that there were eight at the last visitation whereof then incontinent four. In Leicestershire the Compendium reported nothing concerning Langley except the founder's name and a rough statement of the revenue: the Certificate said there were 8 nuns with the prioress all of good and virtuous living, and they all desired to continue. At Gracedie the Compendium named two nuns under "pepererunt": the Certificate said that the 15 ladies there were of good and virtuous living "as apperyth by examinacon and by report of the countrey" and none

(32) MS. torn. -65-
were willing to have capacities. The administrative process which produced these records will be discussed later. The records were the work, in most cases, of Augmentation Office officials and local gentlemen working on mixed commissions and their work, which included a new survey and rental of the lands of each religious house and an inventory of its goods, could not be accomplished with more than a certain degree of haste. It is possible that the local gentlemen on the commissions were expected to specialize upon the report as to the fame of the house, for in some cases the Augmentation receiver seems to have held himself mainly responsible for the surveys. In any case the Certificates were the fruit of a more leisureed, more detailed and more disinterested investigation than the visitation can at best have been.

Upon the data which have now been analysed together with some miscellaneous correspondence, some generalizations may be based with reasonable confidence. Something is known in one or more of these records of the condition of about 64 nunneries, although the visitational records do not all supply certain evidence for the last few years of the life of the houses concerned. A small number of the 64 were certainly in scandalous disorder. This was probably the case at Kington, Wilts, at the visitation of 1535, if we may trust Ap Rice's letter to Cromwell saying that of the three ladies there, two were convicted of incontinency of whom one, under the age of 24, had been discharged: Mary Denys, a fair young woman of Lacock, had been chosen prioress there and possibly she worked a reformation, for the Suppression Certificate said there were four religious there, "by reporte of honest conversacion, all desyrynge continuance"; at Swaffham Cambridgeshire, of which Legh told a highly circumstantial and

(32) See below, chapter V.
(33) L. & P. IX. 160.
scandalous story concerning the relations of the prioress with a certain friar; at Harwood, Bedfordshire, where Layton said he found one nun with two fair children and another with one; and at Warham, mentioned above, ill reported of by Compendium and by Suppression Certificate alike. To these should probably be added Crabhouse, which we know to have presented a case of incontinency in 1514 and which figured largely in the dubious Compendium; Esholt, where one nun had borne a child not long before the suppression on the evidence of the Archbishop's visitation; and perhaps Sopwell, Herts, though the case there was not so clear; Ap Rice remarked in a letter that it would be well to suppress it, "as you may see by the comperts" which he was then sending to Cromwell but which have, of course, disappeared, and he gives no further detail in his letter, but the Commissioners in their Brief Certificate said that the religious there were "of good reporte"; their small household included two children who had their "lyvyng" there. The number of houses against which there is any evidence of sexual misconduct on the verge of the dissolution does not therefore exceed nine out of the 64 of which something is known. On the other hand, in a certain number of cases it is known that the nunnery struck observers as being in conspicuously excellent order. Tregonwell found all things well at Godstow, and Burnet, whatever may have been his authority, strongly confirms this. Concerning Gatesby in Northamptonshire and

(34) IX. 708.


(36) L. & P. IX. 661.

(37) Suppression Papers, Vol. i.fo.88.

(38) This includes two houses where the visitations show that cases of misconduct had occurred: Easebourne, Sussex, in 1512 and Romsey Abbey.

(39) L. & P. IX. 457.


(41) L & P. IX. 457 & X. 856: Wright, p.129.
Pollesworth in Warwickshire (42) the commissioners of 1536 wrote special letters to the Vicar-General praising the communities and begging that they might be exempted. The commissioners who surveyed S. Mary's, Winchester, reported as to its good order in warm terms. (43) The bishop of Coventry and Lichfield wrote to Cromwell on behalf of Acoombury, Herefordshire, where the little girls of the Marches and the adjacent parts of Wales were wont to be brought up in virtue and learning. (44) Sir Brian Hastings wrote on behalf of the nuns of Hampole, near neighbours of his and of good fame. To these might probably be added Gracedien and Langley in Leicestershire and the three remaining houses, Hanwood, Pinley and Wroxall, in Warwickshire, Wintney in Hampshire and Lacock in Wiltshire, except that the excellent report of these rests upon the Brief Certificates alone. Eighteen other houses had been visited in the last few years before the suppression and it is very unlikely that any of them were in actual disorder or contained cases of misconduct. This leaves about 24 out of the 64 houses concerning which the evidence is not absolutely decisive. Against some of them the unreliable Compendium makes charges; on the other hand, some of them were described in the Brief Certificates as being of good fame. It is not probable that they could add largely, if at all, to the list of manifest scandals. These statistics concern just over one-half of the nunneries standing at the beginning of the suppression process but they are almost without exception small, poor, obscure and insignificant, some of them very little known and a number of them in the far north of England. It is likely, therefore, that they include considerably more than half of the "scandalous" houses. The other half of the number of the nunneries included all the great houses, unless Godstow can be reckoned as one, and no suspicion of impropriety has ever attached to such names as those of Shaftesbury.

(42) L.& P. XI. 176. Wright, p. 139.
(44) L.& P. XI. 1370.
(45) XII.(1) 980.
(46) Lacock was found in good order by Ap Rice in 1535:
L.& P. IX,160.
Barking, Amesbury, Tautont or the great London nunneries. It may be guessed, then, that the number of houses containing cases of grave disorder was something between a dozen and a score in the whole country.

When we turn, however, from the cases of actual sexual immorality to attempt a judgment upon the general moral and spiritual quality of the nunnery life in its last years, the task is a far more difficult one. The records are very much more occasional, incidental and ambiguous and although the study of them undoubtedly leaves a certain fairly definite impression upon the mind, it is inevitably far more fallible than any result which is deduced from figures and defended by reference to unequivocal actions.

One fact of rather negative character but quite undisputed so far as it goes, may be recalled at the outset; that the English nunneries in the last years of their existence produced no saints and, if we except Elizabeth Barton, no visionary of any grade. On the other hand it is equally indisputable, being based on cold statistics, that the majority of the nunneries were protected effectively against the corroding power of luxury by their own poverty, though this was of course by no means a final security against worldliness. Neither luxury upon the one hand nor saintliness upon the other, if the two may for a moment be regarded as antitheses, are suggested by histories such as those which have been illustrated in the first chapter. Many of the nuns - it is difficult to guess how many - must certainly have entered the religious life from motives other than purely religious and often enough from motives purely secular. They were all gentlewomen, some of them noblewomen. Some took the habit because there was a traditional family connection with a particular house. Some because they had been early widowed; some because they were physically or mentally unfit for marriage; some, possibly, because they turned instinctively to the career which offered the only existing alternative to marriage; a few because they had been educated in a nunnery and the accident of birth or the disorders of the age had left them friendless. Even where there was a genuine yearning towards the religious life there would be no
guarantee of continuing fervour. The mere passage of time especially in a community of older women of lukewarm religious passion might well cool the uninstructed zeal of the young nun who most probably, it should be remembered, continued to be uninstructed.

They lived in communities entirely drawn from their own social class and instinctively, since they were not transformed by any great enthusiasm, they carried into the nunnery life the ways and customs of that class. The community was a holder of lands and rents from which it had to extract what was often a barely sufficient sustenance and to its tenants and servants it stood in the same relation on a large or small scale, as other people of their class to theirs. They were not, nor did they desire to be, cut off from their class; the link was constantly maintained by letters, by visits to their friends and relations by the lay people who lived in the nunneries or came to visit there, by the guests they entertained. Episcopal attempts to enforce a stricter enclosure were rendered utterly vain by a quiet force of passive resistance. Sometimes the nuns left the house to make a pilgrimage or to pay a visit to their friends and stayed away for long periods; sometimes, leaving the house on such pretexts, they slipped away altogether and it was said that they had "gone into the world", apostatized. They would receive their friends and acquaintances, women and men, freely in many parts of the priory and the visitations are full of the bishops' attempts to limit this practice; they must receive men only in the great hall, in the presence of the prioress or some elder nun. When the convent church was also used as it often, as a parish church, the bishops constantly insisted that a screen should be set between the nuns' quire and the body of the church with gate and lock, an arrangement which the nuns constantly neglected. In such cases, also, the bishops had repeatedly to order that the door between church and cloister should be locked at an early hour in the evening. We read of nuns who were very irregular at divine service and especially of nuns who did not rise for Matins.
matins. At Nuncoton in 1531 the bishop of Lincoln enjoined that they should all "kepe the quire and no more be absent being content if six have been present, the residue to go where they would, some at Thornton, some at Newsom" which were neighbouring canonries. They evaded the obligations of service in kitchen and frater, turning them over to servants of whom they sometimes kept too many for their means. Often they seem to have evaded the regulation that they should all sleep together in the dortor, and sometimes they substituted a more secluded and divided arrangement of "households" for the common meal in the frater. They formed cliques and parties sometimes against the prioress or some other official, sometimes the younger against the elder nuns. In all these details, trivial enough, many of them, when isolated, we can see plainly a tendency to strain and fret against the Rule. The ladies on the whole wished to enjoy the not inconsiderable privileges and securities of the nunnery life and to evade as far as was possible all that was exacting and austere in the service they had undertaken. The conception of an eager acceptance of the Rule, an embracing of the spiritual benefit of its severities, seems so inappropriate in connection with many of the nunneries that it strikes the mind with a sense of the grotesque. The nunnery life was honoured, secure, and not too uncomfortable; though one of these qualities might sometimes be wanting, yet the life on the whole was one well befitting the rank of the only class which usually had admission to it. Even the more distinctively religious qualities which the bishops enjoined at their visitations were matters as it seems to us, mainly of outward observance. Their requirement was rather a certain standard of regularity and order than any fervour or sanctity. The religious

(46) Longland's visitation printed in Archaeological, XLVII. I have refrained from burdening this passage with references; many of its sentences can be illustrated from Chapter I, and all, I think, from the printed visitations to which a general reference has been given.
life had ceased to be a spiritual passion; it had sunk to the level of an honourable career and in some cases below that level also. The convent had become a useful institution, a place of refuge, a school, an inn: and when society on the whole no longer felt any need of the institution it would collapse for it had little inner life to maintain it.
PART II.

THE DISSOLUTION.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NUNNERIES UNDER CROMWELL.
PART II

CHAPTER IV.

THE NUNNERIES UNDER CROMWELL

I. The early months of 1535.

II. The visitations.

I. New situation created by the royal supremacy. Relations of the nuns with the Vicar-General.

Letters as to:

(i) The Pollesworth tithe.
(ii) The stewardship of Malling.

Personal and capricious character of Cromwell's ecclesiastical government.

II. The early visitations of 1535-6: their unique character.

The Instructions.

The general Injunctions.

Chronology of the visitations.

Spirit in which the Instructions were executed.

The visitors and the nuns.
CHAPTER IV.

I.

The events of the years between 1529 and 1535 left the nuns, as they left many other people, in an England which they did not understand. The life of the nunneries had continued in its essentials unchanged from the beginning; now the basic assumptions of the system to which they belonged had disappeared. The world upon which a prioress looked out had been a fairly simple world; at any rate a world in which the fundamental conditions of existence were stable and in which the action of the principal forces affecting her and her house could usually be forecast. The nunnery had been an essential, though a small and unobtrusive element in the structure of medieval society. So long as its financial difficulties were not overwhelming the house worked out its unexciting history more or less undisturbed. The Bishop of the diocese spasmodically exercised his right of visitation; at long intervals such houses as belonged to the more highly organised Orders were reminded of the fact by some interference from the officials of their Order; the ultimate supremacy over them belonged to the Apostolic See and its very remoteness lent stability to the little houses whose status could only be affected by application to the Pope. There was, indeed, an element of the incalculable always present in the relations of the house with the King; but even this had been reduced to a minimum by the quiet power of custom. There might be an occasional intrigue over the deposition of an unsatisfactory officer and the house might be thrown into a few weeks' feverish excitement by a contested election of an abbess or prioress with candidates befriended by great personages in the world; but on the whole the nunnery life was both secure and uneventful and the occasions upon which the average convent was called to take well-judged and important action were few and far between.

The Oath of Supremacy and the enforcement of the statutes of Praemunire, for all their appeal to precedent, cut away the
most essential of the unconscious assumptions upon which the life
of the nuns was built up. Apart from the element of instability
which they introduced into everything that affected the Church,
now left in a state of chronic uncertainty as to the most vital
of its duties and rights, the position of the religious houses
was altered in a way that directly affected them at every turn in
their road. The distant but absolute supremacy of the Pope was
gone and in its place stood a royal supremacy, close at hand and
incomparably stronger, with fewer conflicting interests to dis-
tract its attention and with an attitude anything but disinterest-
ed. The Bishop, hitherto the only effective external power con-
trolling the nuns, were helpless as the nuns themselves in the
new order of things. If the probable attitude of the new absolu-
tion might be forecast from the fashion in which it had exercised
the lesser powers with which it had hitherto been content, its
action would certainly be capricious in the extreme. The cléister-
ed ladies found themselves parts of an order in which nothing what-
ever could safely be taken for granted and in which no tradition
could protect and no precedent could guide them, and they acted
in diverse ways as their wits and their disposition suggested.

The relations between the nuns and the government in
this period of uncertainty can only be deduced from a comparative-
ly small number of surviving letters. Their testimony, however,
is unanimous enough to give a fair idea of the nature of those
relations. There was a universal sense that the position of all
religious houses was eminently insecure. The only force that
promised any substantial support was the dearly-bought friendship

(2) Nearly all mentioned in Gairdner, Letters and Papers,
Vol. IX. et sqq. A number of them also have been
printed in full; State Papers, Vol. I. (Rec. Comm.)
Ellis, Original Letters. Wright, Three Chapters of
Letters relating to the Suppression of Monasteries
(Camden Society, 1842)
of the Vicar-General, who made the fullest use of the general desire to avoid a quarrell with him. The religious houses became in his eyes another source of patronage wherewith he could buy or reward support and there is an apologetic note even in the refusal by an abbess of whom nothing but good is known, to cancel for the benefit of one of his protégés an obligation under convent seal. Witness the following letter from the abbess of Pollesworth, under date February 6, 1535:

Right worshipful and my verrey singular good master I commende me to your maistership acerteynyng the same that of late I have receyved your letters in the favour of on Amyas Hyll for to have the tenthe of .Amnysley in ferme and to sende my answere in writinge to your maistership. Syr of truthe the saide tenthe is lette to ferme and twoe yer~s is yet behynde to a honest poore man dwellynge thereopon and kepps good hospitalite amongst the poore parochians. And without it he is not able to kepe no house. Wherefore it may please yow maistership he have hys yer~s yet behynde. I shalbe content than to accomplish your request with my dayly prayer as knowith our Lorde God - - - -

Your beddworan (3)

Abbess of Pollesworth.

More complicated and more illuminating was another difficulty which arose over the highestwardship of the abbey of Malling In February 1535 apparently Cromwell wrote to request the abbess, Elizabeth Rede, to give the office, or the promise of it "after the dethe of Master Fyssher", to his nephew Richard Cromwell. The abbess answered that she had promised it to Sir Thomas Willoughby's som and that Cromwell must apply to Sir· Thomas Willoughby. Either the office was not intended for Richard Cromwell himself to hold or else his uncle saw reason to shift his patronage, for three days later, on February 20, the abbess wrote to Thomas Wyat in similar terms mentioning the receipt of letters from the King's grace and from Master Secretary in favour of his application. He was henceforth the official candidate. The office seems to have fallen vacant and was bestowed by the independent Abbess upon Si:d! (4) Edward Wotton, sheriff of Kent, not upon Sir Thomas Willoughby's son; the explanation may perhaps be that he was still a child, for he is never mentioned in his own person. This of course brought the Abbess into disgrace with the Vicar-General and Wotton himself, who was a government man and no friend to monasteries was

ordered to bring her to reason. He wrote on March 6 to Cromwell describing an interview with her. He had told her that he could reckon no way of help unless she would make a new patent of the office under seal to Mr Wyat and send it with his own patent to Cromwell. The abbess said that if he pleased to return his patent to her she would cancel it before his eyes but she would make no promises as to Wyat. Wotton said that he only resigned on condition that she gave the office to Wyat and because he saw more danger to her than commodity to himself in keeping it. He was not able to discover her determination and so left his patent with her and departed, not a little in her displeasure. She said that she might have bestowed it on others who would much better have shifted therewith than he had done. Her disappointment at the behaviour of her chief lay official and natural protector would have found an echo in the hearts of many of her sisters in other parts of England; it was a fortunate abbess who found her chief steward anything but the veriest broken reed in the difficult trials that were coming. The office was given to Thomas Wyat in the end, for he held it when the return was sent in for the Valor later in the same year.

On the whole the most striking characteristic of the Vicar-General’s correspondence throughout these last years of English monasticism was its completely personal nature. The atmosphere of the great man’s antechamber pervaded every part of his administration. Action so ordinary that one would expect it to take place automatically had to be solicited with extravagant politeness in personal letters. Thus when the prioress of Garrow died after governing laudably for 23 years the Bishop of Norwich wrote reporting the fact, reminding Cromwell that in consequence of their poverty and exilium they had not been accustomed to sue for a licence and asking that they might have licence and elect a new prioress. A certain Reynold Lytelprow who was on friendly terms with Cromwell also wrote for the mayor (presumably of Norwich) making suit on behalf of the nuns and naming two of them as fit

(5) L.& P. viii.220, 249, 349. (6) V.E. i. 106.
to rule. There was a general impression, moreover, that the heads of convents held their office by a precarious tenure to which the friendship of the Vicar-General was all important; for example in March 1535 a certain Richard Wharton, known to Cromwell, writes to him on behalf of a "neighbor and friend" the prioress of Flixton. Rumour said that Cromwell intended to send a visitor to depose her; if it were so, Wharton begged him to respite the matter until he spake with him, for the complaints which had come to his knowledge arose from her enemies. All the action of the government was as arbitrary as it was novel and the maintenance of offices which had been permanent and honorable for centuries became suddenly as unstable as the prestige of a courtier.

(7) L.& P. viii. 317, 318.
(8) L.& P. viii. 372.
On January 21, 1535, a commission was issued to the Vicar-General for a general visitation of the churches, monasteries and clergy. Nothing was done in pursuance of it for several months; probably there was enough to be done in the very rapid collection of material for the valuation of ecclesiastical property, for which commissions were issued in every shire on January 30. However in the early autumn the main bulk of this work had been completed and the project of visitation became prominent in the government programme.

The visitation which followed has been more frequently and passionately described than any other passage in the history of English reformation. Our very familiarity with its external features perhaps tends to deaden our appreciation of its unique character. There were, of course, no precedents for such a visitation, nor did it ever serve as a precedent for any other. The process by which it was accomplished was as unique as its own character. No commissions under the Great Seal are known to have been issued to the visitors, nor do they appear to have been appointed to visit in defined localities, and unless we except the Compendium Compertorum of which the surviving fragments will be discussed later, there seem to have been no formal records at all. If there were any such, they have disappeared with a uniformity in itself very inconsistent with the extreme care with which even the most unimportant records were usually preserved. Practically everything that is known about the subject is contained in letters, informal as a record if not personal in nature, written by the visitors to the Vicar-General. The almost inextricable confusion of public and private interests which seems to be inseparable from personal government was not even veiled, as almost any other than Cromwell would surely have tried to veil it, by a fictitious adherence to traditional forms. If we can imagine such a visitation as it would have been carried out in the fourteenth century, we

(2) L.& P. viii. 75.
dimly begin to see that from the point of view of administrative tradition the whole business can most soberly be described as revolutionary.

Burnet(5)published a document from the MS. Cotton. Cleop. E. iv. headed "Instructions for a General Visitation of the Monasteries" and another from the same source containing "General Injunctions to be Given in all Monasteries", with a note to the effect that the visitors might add other spiritual injunctions at their discretion as the place and the nature of the "comperts" should suggest. Neither of these documents is dated but there is every reason to believe that tradition is right in assuming that they belong to the beginning of this visitation. Neither the inquiries to be made nor the General Injunctions differ very widely in their substance from those that had appeared for the last two centuries at the stricter episcopal visitations. The inquiries include the usual questions as to the due observance of divine service; the number of inmates, their knowledge of their rule, their observance of fasting, silence, the wearing of the habit; the use of their revenues and maintenance of hospitality; whether they kept their common seal duly under three keys, whether they could produce an inventory of their goods, and whether they exacted a money payment for the profession of a new inmate. There are also some special inquiries for nuns as to their sufficient enclosure and communication with seculars, whether any had been professed unwillingly, whether any were known to be familiar with any men other than their near kinsmen, or sent or received any love-letters or tokens, whether their confessor was of good repute and how often they were wont to be confessed and communicate. The General Injunctions were decidedly severe but almost all of them can be paralleled from the episcopal visitations. In the case of nuns, at any rate, popes and bishops had made many efforts to secure complete enclosure; it was now ordered by the Vicar-General that no religious were to go out of the precincts of their houses(4) and that entry


(4) Described by Gasquet (p.80) as "this impossible regulation". Impossible or not, it was certainly not an original one, at any rate as regards nunneries; the church authorities had frequently been as unreasonable as Cromwell in the matter of enclosure.
to them should be only by the great fore-gate. There were the usual orders that the officers should render to the house a yearly account, that all except the governor of the house should sleep in the dorter, that a fire should be kept from All Hallows to Good Friday, that no fair or markets should be kept within the "limits" of the house. There was also a new clause that the religious "show no reliques or feigned miracles for increase of lucre but that they exhort pilgrims and strangers to give that to the poor that they thought to offer to their images or reliques."

The chronology of the visitation of 1535 is not perfectly clear. The visitation of bishops was only inhibited on September 18, 1535 and for this reason Dixon supposes that the visitation can hardly have begun before October. (5) The "records of a visitation in Oxford and elsewhere that was going on in August" he assigns "with some hesitation" to 1536. This does not seem possible, however, in view of its connection (6) with the visitation of the University which certainly belongs to 1535. Nor does there seem to be any reason to believe that "they do not refer to the same kind of visitation", though of course the extreme imperfection of the documentary evidence makes any such assertion somewhat dangerous.

There is a letter of Tregonwell to Cromwell dated September 12, in which he reports that he and Layton have ended the visitation of Oxford University and that they intend to-morrow to proceed separately, Layton to Abingdon, he to Godstow, (7) and on September 27, he writes from Stoudeley reporting favourably as to the condition of Godstow and Catesby in terms which do not suggest that any other kind of visitation was made. "From Stoudeley I entend to Notley and thens to Tame Abbey and last of all to Dorchester, where I make an ende unto the tyme I may knowe yr furder pleasure." (8) There was another visitation in progress in August and September.

(6) See below.
(7) L.& P. IX. 351.
(8) Ibid. 457.
by Legh and Ap Rice of which traces are found in Wiltshire and Dorsetshire. Here, also, however, the year can be fixed as 1535; the abbess of Wherwell, Anne Colte, was induced by the visitors for some unknown cause, to resign on a pension of £20, and the patent assenting to the election of her successor bears date October 2, 27 Henry VIII. The fact establishes a probability that the other letters, bearing date from August to October in series, describing monastic visitations by Legh and Ap Rice, in the southwest also belong to the year 1535; and the nature of the visitation is settled by the letter from Cecil Bodman, abbess of Wilton, to Cromwell on September 5. The inhibition of other visitational powers was hardly a technical necessity for a proceeding so entirely without precedent and if the visitation was begun before the inhibition the irregularity would surely not be a very serious matter among so much that was irregular. Certainly in the diocese of York, an episcopal visitation in progress was actually interrupted by the inhibition. No visitation was made in Yorkshire until January 1536, although it was proposed by Layton in a letter to Cromwell dated June 4; but the need for an inhibition may only have

(9) V.C.H. Hampshire, II. 136.
(10) L.& P. IX. 516.
(11) L.& P. IX. 280.- - Mr Doctor Legh the kinges graces special visitor and your depute in this behalf, visiting of late my house, hathe given inunction that not only all my sisters but I also shulde contynually kepe and abide within the pre­ cincts of my house - - - yt maye please your worship of your goodness to license me being associate with on or twayne of the sad and discrete sisters of my house to supervise abrode suche things as shalbe for the provffite and commoditie of my house - - - withe licence also if it shall please your worship that any of my sisters when their father, mother, brother or sister or any suche nye of their kyne come unto them may have licence to speke with them in the hall in my presens or my prioresse and other twoe discrete sisters - - -

(12) Stype, Ecclesiastical Memorials, I, Pt. 1., p. 383.

-81-
become manifest after the visitation had already begun.\(^{(13)}\)

Assuming that letters in question have all been correctly assigned to the year 1535, the earliest trace of the visitation of nunneries is found in Ap Rice's letter of August 23, reporting favourably of Lacock and unfavourably of Kington; \(^{(14)}\) the house of Lacock was well ordered and the ladies had their rule written in French which they understood well and were very perfect in the same; at Kington they found only three ladies of whom two were convicted of incontinency and one, under 24, who did not desire to remain was discharged. "Dame Mary Denys a fair young woman of Lacock" was chosen prioress at Kington, apparently at this time. Wilton was visited about this time; Wherwell some time in September and probably others in the southwest of which no record survives.

Early in October, however, Legh and Ap Rice were apparently sent on a new tour setting out from London through Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire \(^{(15)}\) and in November they visited in Suffolk and Norfolk. The University of Cambridge was visited in the last part of October in the course of this progress; that of Oxford had already been purged by Layton and Tregonwell in the early days of September, after which Tregonwell proceeded to visit other Oxfordshire houses. Layton's movements are not so clear, as some of his surviving letters are not even dated with the day of the month, but he seems to have gone back to London via Abingdon and then to Sussex and Kent. \(^{(16)}\) At the end of December Legh and Layton met at Lichfield \(^{(17)}\), Layton visiting on the way several houses in Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire and Leicestershire; and by the end of February they had visited together the whole province of York and bishopric of Durham. On February 4 began the session of Parliament which some time in February or March passed the act for the

\(^{(13)}\) See also Wright, Suppression of the Monasteries, p. 91, a letter for Layton on the way North: "the Bishop of Lincoln visited at Leicester & throughout his diocese at Lent last only to prevent the King's visitation; he cannot visit but de triennio in triennium and he prevented his time more than half a year".

\(^{(14)}\) L.& P. IX. 160. \(^{(15)}\) L.& P. IX, 361, 661, 694.

\(^{(16)}\) L.& P. IX. 444. \(^{(17)}\) Dixon, op. cit. I, 335-7.
suppression of the smaller houses and in April set up the Court of Augmentations.

The surviving letters of these visitors contain a certain amount of miscellaneous information as to the visitations of the nunneries. Emphasis has been laid upon the conservative character of the Instructions and General Injunctions but that character did not convince the religious that no danger was to be feared from the visitation nor, indeed, does it seem to have been maintained either in spirit or in practice by the visitors. In some cases they seem to have neglected even the letter of the Instructions - that is, if the instructions printed by Burnet were issued at the outset of this visitation. The Instructions stated that no one under the age of 20 should wear the habit. Legh and Ap Rice apparently extended this so that religious who had been professed before the age of 22 were expelled from their houses and then extended it in the case of monks to 24. Ap Rice wrote to Cromwell claiming that it was still more desirable to do so in the case of nuns and complaining that Legh did not extend it in their case. In a later letter he asserted that Cromwell had ordered the more liberal course but the Vicar-General apparently ended the controversy by fixing the limit at 20 as in the instructions preserved. Legh, writing to him from Cambridge on October 22, treated this as a new order. "And as for your pleasure nowe aftsones declared unto us, for not expelling of theym that are above thage of xxt1t shalbe folowed as far as it may lie in me. But many there be alredy dismissed in place where we have ben above thage and whether ye wolde have any restrainste agein made of theym lett yo" worship see". The matter is unimportant except as an illustration of the spirit in which the visitations were carried out; anything that could be done within the scope of a visitation to weaken the position of the monasteries was done.

(18) L.& P. IX, 423, 622, 651, 661.
In Cambridgeshire, at the abbey of the Minoresses of S. Clare of Denny, the visitors found nuns over the age of 24 who were anxious to be freed from their vows. Legh described their importunity in three different letters, dated October 21, October 27 and October 30. (19) "Let me know your mind concerning those religious persons who instantly kneeling on their knees desire to be delivered of such religion as they have ignorantly taken upon themselves."

"We found half-a-dozen who with tears in their eyes begged to be dismissed." The assertion was not made of any other house and although it is quite credible in itself, especially in view of the strictness of the rule of S. Clare, it is not enough to justify the assumption that all the nunneries or many of them contained numerous people who were eager to be set free from their vows. In this case, Legh pointed out with particular care the advantages of granting their prayer - they would not need to be put forth and the deed would be imputed to themselves; and Ap Rice adds a postscript to his letter, that to avoid calumny it were well they were dismissed upon their own suit and not straight discharged while the visitors were there, for then the people would say they came for no other purpose. It may be noted that three professed nuns and a novice of the Minoresses without Aldgate, of the ages of 23$, 22, 21 and 15 sent a petition to Cromwell (20) praying that they might either be restored or else have license to be in the Close House until they were 24 and then to be professed again if God should call them.

Whether it was due to the attitude of the visitors, or to the general tendency to distrust any unprecedented action, or to both causes in conjunction with the contemporary heretical and anti-clerical attacks upon the monasteries, there seems to have been a very general suspicion of the visitation and a fair appreciation of its probable motives. In some cases the less upright of the monastic officials apparently hastened to forestall the

(19) L.& P. IX. 657, 694, 708.
(20) L.& P. IX. 1075, Gairdner does not identify the house.
coming confiscation by the sale of lands leases and goods, presumably for their private profit. It is difficult to guess to what extent this occurred. Certainly it began early: in Norfolk in November, 1535, Le.gh found that the religious made preparations of this kind before the visitors reached their houses at all as at a lewd nunery hereby called Crabhouse where they have sold land to Mr Conyshie and others therabouts, which we have sequestrated and stayed the prioress from further alienation until the King's pleasure or yours be known" (21)

Nicholas Sanders, (22) the Roman Catholic writer of Elizabeth's reign, who can hardly be cited as "almost a contemporary" said in reference to this visitation "Lee, indeed, in order to discharge correctly the duties laid upon him, tempted the religious to sin, and he was more ready to inquire into and speak about uncleanness of living than anything else." Fuller (23) says: "The papists do heavily complain (how justly God alone knoweth) that a third sort of agents were employed to practise on the chastity of the nuns so to surprise them into wantonness" and tells a story which he does not think it necessary to believe. Cardinal Gasquet (24) has taken up the matter and brings to the support of his two authors a letter from Ortiz to the Empress (25), which in fact makes a different and less serious accusation and which is so inaccurate in its other statements as to suggest that it was entirely based on gossip: "They have taken the able persons out of some monasteries and left the infirm with so little to maintain them that they are constrained to leave their religion. They have taken all the nuns under twenty-five years from the monastery. One of the commissaires spoke imp properly to the nuns, who rebuked him, saying that their Apostolic privileges were broken. The commissary replied that he had more power on behalf of the King that the whole Apostolic See.

(21) L.& P. IX. 808.
(22) Rise & Growth of the Anglican Schism, published 1885; quotation from Lewis's translation, London, 1877.
(25) L.& P. ix. 873.
When the nuns referred their complaint to Cromwell, the King's Secretary, by whom these ill deeds are done, he replied that this was only the prologue. Over the whole matter, as Cardinal Gasquet says, "history has, perhaps wisely, drawn a veil"; it is apparently possible that there should be two opinions as to the "glimpses" which he claims to have caught of the "dreadful reality". No letter or other contemporary record gives a hint of any such thing, nor is it known to have been mentioned either in support or denial by any secondary authority who had a close acquaintance with an instance of it. (26) No nun made any complaint of improper speech or treatment of which record is known and the visitors' letters to Cromwell, usually exceedingly frank, contain no hint of it. It may be that posterity has not, on the whole, done much injustice to the character of Legh, Layton and their brethren, but this particular accusation, at any rate, the evidence refuses to sustain.

(26) The only other mention of it which has been noticed is by the Rev. J.H. Blunt (Reformation of the Church of England; London, 1869), who thinks Fuller's story has too much resemblance to be set aside "in this curt manner".
PART II.

CHAPTER V.

THE SUPPRESSION OF THE SMALLER NUNNERIES.
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THE SUPPRESSION OF THE SMALLER NUNNERIES.

Summary of the Act for
(a) the suppression
(b) the establishment of the Court of
Augmentations.

(ii) Machinery of the new Survey.
"Brief Certificates!"
Personnel of the Commissions.

(iii) Attitude of the gentry; letters from
(a) the spoilers.
(b) the defenders.

(iv) Machinery of Suppression.
Its initiation.
Studies in Receivers' Accounts.

(v) The commotion in the North.
Repeopling of Seton, Nunburnholme,
Clementhorpe.
CHAPTER V.

The monastic revolution was initiated in the last session of the parliament which met in 1529 and was dissolved in April, 1536. Almost before the incomplete "general visitation" had ceased, the act was passed which authorized the dissolution of the smaller religious houses and shortly afterwards another provided the necessary new machinery for its execution. The relation between the visitation and the legislation has never been clearly established and in the conspicuous absence of satisfactory evidence it probably never will be established. The existence of the traditional Black Book, compiled from the records of the visitation, which converted Parliament instantly to the necessity for the dissolution of the monasteries, never rested upon a very sure foundation and the legend of it has now been entirely discredited by Dixon(2) and Gairdner(3). There seems to be every reason for accepting their view that if the Black Book ever existed a part of its substance survives in the Compendium Compertorum, which has been discovered above(4), and more fully and reliably appraised by the two historians named. Even if such a summary existed at the time, as is not improbable, for all the counties visited in the winter of 1535-6 under the Vicar-General's direction, its value as a record would have been extremely small: the more it is studied, the less important does it appear to be. Moreover, a great part of England was left quite untouched by the visitation. If it was a bona fide attempt to investigate the state of the monasteries, there was a pitiful want of thoroughness in its execution, for even the favoured houses were visited only very hastily. If parliament swept away by the evidence of a Compendium Compertorum like the extant fragment, passed the act under the influence of its reforming zeal, its action does less credit to its judgment than to its

(3) Lollardy & the Reformation, bk.iii., chap.i.
(4) See above, chap. iii, pp.77-82.
enthusiasm. On the other hand, if the dissolution was forced through parliament as Gairdner\(^\text{(5)}\) suggests and as Spelman asserted\(^\text{(6)}\), the king could doubtless have achieved that end with even less show of justification. Certainly the act for the suppression bears marks of amendment in the interest of the landholding class in the clause which attempts to reserve the rights of founders. The whole subject is very obscure: the essential fact for posterity as it was for Henry VIII, is that the act was passed.

It will perhaps be convenient if these much-discussed acts are once more summarized here. The act for the suppression of the smaller religious houses,\(^\text{(7)}\) after a magnificent preamble culminating in the statement "that it is much more to the Pleasure of Almighty God and for the honour of this Realm" that monastic property "should be used and committed to better Uses and the Unthrifty Religious Persons so spending the same to be compelled to reform their lives," enacts that the King shall have and enjoy all such houses and their property under the clear yearly value of £200. Their ornaments, jewels, goods, chattels and debts were to be his from March 1, 1536. Saving clauses were inserted for the rights of everyone connected with the religious houses except the religious themselves, who were, however, to be granted pensions or provided with places in the great houses, "wherein", as the preamble had said, "(thanks be to God) Religion is right well kept." The act establishing the King's Court of Augmentations of the Revenues of his Crown\(^\text{(8)}\) was a well-drafted measure clearly describing the composition, functions, status and powers of the new organization which it created. The survey of the court included all monasteries suppressed

\(\text{(5)}\) Loc. cit.


\(\text{(7)}\) 27. Henry VIII, c. 28, S.R. iii, 575.

\(\text{(8)}\) 27. Henry VIII, c. 27, S.R. iii, 569.
under the former act and all lands which the King might acquire
by purchase and grants of such lands were to be made under its
seal on a warrant directed to the Chancellor of the Augmentations
under the King's Sign Manual. All the members of the court, in-
cluding clerk, usher, and messenger, were to be named by the King.
A Chancellor, Treasurer, Attorney and Solicitor were to be the
four principal officers, with ten Auditors and seventeen Particular
Receivers, among whom the lands were to be apportioned by the
Chancellor. The system of checking accounts was carefully pre-
scribed in the Act and the auditors and receivers were responsible
for all the detail of the management of the lands while they were
in the King's hands, collecting rents, attending to repairs and
surveying woods.

The King named the members of his Court of Augmentations
who began to perform their functions with little loss of time.
The auditors and receivers were duly assigned to their sections
of England by the Chancellor. The first stage of the dissolution
process was outlined in a set of general instructions (9) signed by
the King and on April 24, commissions were issued for each county
to an auditor and particular receiver, to a "clerk of the register
of the last visitation" and to certain gentlemen referred to in
the instructions as "three other discreet persons", although in
some cases the number was certainly more than three; in appearance
the typical Tudor combination of official and non-official elements.
Their duties as set forth in the instructions were to repair to
every house that came within their view and declare to the gover-
nor and religious persons the statute of dissolution; to enquire
of the governor or some other officer upon oath as to a number of
articles, the order and status of the house, the number of inmates
and servants and their "conversation"; to call for the convent
seal and all its records and put the jewels and plate in safe
keeping, to value the lead and bells, make an inventory of the

(9) Printed by Burnet in his Collection of Records; ed. 1865,
Vol. IV, 304.7. I have not seen the original.
goods and debts, survey the demesnes, enquire as to commons, parks, woods, etc. and to find the yearly value of all rents and farms; and to investigate bargains, sales, leases etc. made within one year before February 4, 1536. They were then to command the religious to receive no rents except for necessary expenses and to till and sow the ground as before until the King's pleasure was further known. If, however, the commissioners had been notified that the house had already been granted by the King, they were to take an inventory indented and to sell the goods of the house excepting plate and jewels, to take the convent seal and dissolve the community, sending those religious who wished to continue to some other great house of that religion with a letter to the governor to receive them and those who desired "capacities" to the archbishop of Canterbury with a letter. These last were to receive "some reasonable reward" according to the distance they would have to travel. They were to command the governor to resort to the Chancellor of the Augmentations for his pension. As they completed the survey of each shire, they were to send a "brief certificate" of each house to the Court of Augmentations.

This apparently lengthy and complicated process of survey and examination was accomplished with remarkable speed. The instructions were issued on April 24 and by the end of June some of the "brief certificates" were in the hands of the central authorities. They were generally arranged on a uniform pattern

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(10) The same provisions applied to small houses voluntarily surrendered: e.g. the Brief Certificate of Henwood, Warwickshire (Exch: Treas: of the Receipt Miscell: Bks 184) says that there were 6 nuns of good conversation, all content to surrender, on which they took the same and discharged the nuns immediately.

(11) For an example of the miscellaneous papers relating to this survey see Crabhouse and Blackborough, Suppression Papers, vols. i & iv (L. & P. xii, 11), 245, 261. These records are much scattered; the demesne surveys are the best preserved bound together, with a few other miscellaneous papers, in the volumes entitled "Paper Surveys". (Augmentation Office Miscell. Bks. 397-404 & 406.)
in columns. Though their summary was, it involved the completion of all the other work of the survey before it could be drawn up. The valuations made in the previous year for the assessment of the King's tenth were referred to as "the last survey" and a new survey of lands and rents was now made. In most cases it slightly exceeded the former valuation. The demesnes in the majority of cases had not been surveyed in detail for the Valor which, moreover, very seldom gave any information as to commons and forests. The returns of debts owing to and by the house and the inventories of goods were also entirely new. All this detailed work had to be completed before the totals could be classified in a Brief Certificate. The scattered examples which survive of the records then made supply priceless material for the study of the economic position of the religious houses at the time of their dissolution.

The actual suppression of the houses was certainly carried out by the receiver and auditor for the district. It is, however, a question of considerable interest how far the preliminary work of survey was executed by the officials and how far by the local gentlemen who were included in the commissions. The attempt to associate them with his policy was characteristic of Henry VIII and if they avoided, or were not entrusted with, any active share in the execution of the commission, the fact may be significant.

Some explanation is required of a chronological difficulty with regard to the survey in Leicestershire. A commission was issued to Sir John Newell, Roger Radclyff, John Beaumont, William Ashley, George Giffard and Robert Burgoyn, the two last being officials who were also on the commission for Northamptonshire. The Leicestershire commission was dated June 24. On June 27, Giffard wrote to Cromwell to say that they had finished the survey in Leicestershire and that he was sending the certificate of it to him by one

Passing over for a moment the interesting point that he was sending the certificate to Cromwell and not to the Chancellor of the Augmentations, Sir Richard Riche, the three days interval between the grant of the commission and the completion of the survey requires an explanation which may be that the officials had already done most of the work, as they were empowered to do by the Act before the commissioners were even appointed. The surveys which the commissioners made were signed or headed in various ways. Only one, a rental of Wroxall, Warwickshire (14) has been found which is headed by the names in full of the commissioners for the county; the case is probably not unique but it is certainly very exceptional. Demesne surveys of Yorkshire nunneries are signed in various ways, the majority by Hugh Fuller, auditor, some by Leonard Bekwith and Hugh Fuller, one at least by James Rokeby, auditor, who also signed the Cumberland surveys, and one at least is unsigned. (15) Certificates of debts in Northamptonshire, Warwickshire and Leicestershire (16) were made "upon the coporall othes of severall governors and other religious persons -- -- before George Giffard and Robert Burgoyn and the King's commissioners ther." In Leicestershire

(13) Giffard's letter, L.& P. X. 1215. Brief Certificate, Treas. of the Receipt Misc: Bks. 154, fo. 95f L.& P. X. 1191. It is headed, as usual, by the names of all the commissioners and a statement of the commission. Giffard and Burgoyn were accused at a later date of irregularity in acting without the other commissioners: see below, p. 135 ff. No record is known of any proceedings against them and they continued to be employed by the Court of Augmentations. The other commissioners were, of course, not mentioned in either of the Acts.

(14) A.O. Misc: Bks 404, fo. 199.
(15) A.O. Misc: Bks. 401.

-92-
at any rate, either the letter referred to above must be wrongly dated or the inclusion of the commissioners must be pure courtesy. The papers relating to the suppression of Sopwell, Hertfordshire, include certain "artycles mnistered by Sir Richard Lee, knight, and Thomas Mildemaye, one of the Kyng's audytors" which suggests specialization among the commissioners rather than the absorption of their functions by the officials. The Brief Certificates always bear the names of all the commissioners with some recital of their commission. Some of the Yorkshire houses referred to above were not dissolved and probably not surveyed until 1539, after the Pilgrimage of Grace, so that their case cannot be regarded as normal. The practice of the commissioners may have varied in different parts of the country. The nunny records do not on the whole supply enough evidence for an assertion that the King's commissioners were little more than names associated with those of the receiver and auditor, but that is the direction in which the indications point.

If the letters which have survived are a reliable guide as to the general feeling of the gentry towards the smaller monasteries, they were disposed at any rate to make what profit they might out of an unavoidable evil. Apart from the personal friends and relatives of the inmates, every nunny had some links with the gentry of the country, who provided it with patron or founder and very often with chief steward, and these links were in many cases promptly converted into claims upon the property of the house. As early as April 1, occurs a letter from Sir George Darey to Cromwell: he has written, he says, to the King for the preferment of Swine, of which his wife is foundress after the death of her father. Sir John Nevill had a claim upon Hampole, not less hopefully urged; he begged it for his son-in-law Gervase Clyfton, one of the King's wards whom he had of the King for one of his daughters; his ancestors were founders of that place. For himself he "besought" Cromwell to have him in remembrance for

Wallingwells or for something else. Sir William Gascoigne wrote in June: (20) if the nunnery of Nunmonkton founded by his ancestors went to the King's augmentation, he begged that he might have the preferment of it, paying as much as any other would. A lady who signed herself "d. Oxynford" sent Cromwell an undated letter (21) asking for the farm of "a place of nuns in Norfolk called Blakborow" as she understood that abbeys under £200 a year were at the King's pleasure to "oppress"; failing Blakborow upon which she had the special claim of foundress, she asked for the house of Schuldham which was not far from her lands. A new element seems to enter with the letter of John Uvedale (22) to Cromwell in 1538: he was persuaded that the Holy Word of God would in brief time hunt all manner religious persons out of their monasteries and when it happened he asked Cromwell to obtain for him from the King "that I mought be hys fernoer for my yerly rente of the house demaynes and personage now belonging unto a little pore Nunnry in thse partes called Manyke. It sholde be - - moche to my pore estymacion if it mought appare in thse partes that the kings said majestie oth his accustomed goodnes wold remembre with suche a thyng soo pore a man as I am and servyng soo ferre cff?"

But these letters probably represent the attitude of a section of the gentry only; many who kept silent must have disliked the changes intensely besides those whose hatred of them became articulate in the autumn of the year among the rebels of the Pilgrimage of Grace and there was not an utter silence on the part of those who might venture to speak in defence of the religious. Thus Sir Peter Edgecumbe wrote to Cromwell in March 1538, on behalf of the nunnery of Cornworthy and another small house whose founders he represented. One or two letters written by the

(20) X. 1152.
(21) X. 385.
(22) L & P. XIII (1), 49. Uvedale was employed on a number of commissions for receiving the greater houses upon their surrender.
(23) L. & P. XII. 551. Wright, p. 117.
commissioners are of special interest; the commissioners for Northamptonshire wrote on May 12 in favour of Catesby (24) which was in perfect order the prioress wise and very religious and nine nuns as good. The house much to the relief of the King's people and in the judgment of the commissioners none was more deserving of pity. More eloquent were the Warwickshire commissioners in praise of Pollesworth (25) where there were "twelve virtuous and religious nuns — of good conversation by our examinations and by open fame and report and never one of the nuns will leave their habit. Ye shall not speak in the preferment of a better nunnery. In the town of Pollesworth are forty-four tenements and never a plough but one, the residue be artificers, laborers and vitellers and lyve in effect by the saide house and the repayre and resort theys made to the gentlemen's children and sudjournements that ther doo lif to the nombre of 30, 40, or more, that thei be right vertuously brought up. And the town and nunnery standeth in a hard soil and barren ground and to our estimations if the nunnery be suppressed, the towne will shortly after fall to ruin and decay, and the people therein to the number of six or seven score persons are not unlike to wander." The repute of Acornbury was set forth by the Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield in a letter to Cromwell in December: (26) the gentlemen of Abergavenny and the Marches and the adjoining parts of Wales had commonly had their women-children brought up there in virtue and learning. He begged Cromwell to get the King to take the same to redemption and grace "wherein trouste ye me surely my goode lorde ye shall adquyre bothe lawde and love of thies partes"? The Lincolnshire nunnery of Légbourne had the doubtful advantage of Cromwell as its founder and the prioress and convent wrote begging him to be a suitor for his own poor priory; (27) so he should be a higher founder to them than he

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(24) L.& P. X. 858. Wright, p. 129.
(26) L.& P. XI. 1370.
who first founded their house. The appeal was in vain. A means usually more trusty was taken by Joyce, prioress of that nunnery of Catesby whose praises had been sung by the commissioners: her letter deserves quotation:

"Pleaseth hit yor mastership to call to yor remembrance that doctor Gwent informed you yester‐ nyght that the Queene's grace hath moved the kynges maieste for me and hath offered his highness too thousand marks in recompence of that house of Cates‐ by and hath as yet no perfect answere. Yf hit may lyke you nowe in my grett sorowe and pencyvenes to be so good master to me as to opteyne that the kynges grace do grannte that the house may stonde and gayte me yeres of payment for the ii111 marks you shall have an 0 marks of me to by you a geldyng and my prayers duryng my lyff and all my systers duryng their lyves. I trust you have not forgotten the report that the commisioners dyd sende unto you of me and my systers. Master Ouley saith that he hath a grannte of the house but my very trust is in god and you to help forward that the quenes grace may opteyne her request that hit may stonde and this I beseche allmyghty god sende you ever such conforte at your nede as hit was to my hart yesternyght when Doctor Gwent did sende me worde that you wold move the kyngs grace for me the mornyng ayen.

Yor most bounden of all creatures Joyce late prioress of Catesby.

Perhaps the "yeres of payment" were too much for Cromwell; at all events he resigned the prospect of "such conforte at his nede" and the priory was suppressed for all the wirepulling that the good prioress could do.

The Act of Suppression had confirmed to the King, if that were necessary the power of granting Letters Patent to exempt any house from the operation of the act. Twenty-seven nunneryes are known to have been so exempted; the first grants were made on August 17, 1536, to Chateris, Gracedien and S. Mary's, Winchester; the last on July 12, 1538, to Nunappleton. It is impossible to discover any principle upon which the issue of the grants was determined. In some cases they are known to have been purchased by the payment of large sums of money to the King and it is probable that this was usually the case but it was not invariably so; thus the poor Cistercian nunnery of Kirklees was confirmed on May 15, 1538, for worship and hospitality and no payment is known to have been made.

Nor do the payments appear to have had

(28) L.& P. X. 383.

much relation to the wealth of the convent. The much-lauded
Warwickshire house of Pollesworth (30) had a gross income of
£115.18.4. and obtained its exemption for £50. Easyard, Suffolk
had an income of £74.6.10 and paid £80. Delapre, Northampton, had
had an income of £132.15.6 and paid £266.15.4. besides leaving
some land at Hanslope, Bucks, in the King's hands. The case of
two Lincolnshire nunneries was more complicated. Stainfield was
a house of Benedictine, Stixwold of Cistercian nuns. Stixwold
was suppressed in August 1536 and the Stainfield nuns obtained exm
exemption and were transferred to Stixwold, under a new prioress,
the former prioress being pensioned. The Stixwold nuns received
their arrears of wages and "rewards" of 20s a piece from the revenues of
Stainfield which was valued in 1535 at £112.12.9. and the
Stainfield nuns apparently entered into possession of the Stixwold
properties, valued at £163.1.1. Their confirmation had to be
bought, however, by payment of a sum of 900 marks and a pension
of £54 a year and the new prioress, Mary Missenden was liable to
pay first-fruits reckoned at £150. On January 8, 1537, the nuns
wrote to Mr Hennage, asking him to get Cromwell to intercede with
the King for remission of the pensions; otherwise they must give
up their house to the King, which were pity. The last stage in
the vicissitudes of the house was entered in July, 1537, when it
was again refounded by Letters Patent as a Premonstratensian
nunnery, to hold the original possessions of Stixwold as before
the act of suppression, paying the King a yearly rent of £15.5.1.
The convent surrendered on September 19, 1539. (31)

When the survey had been completed and the Brief Certifi-
cate sent to the Chancellor of the Augmentations, the actual
business of suppression remained to be carried out by the recei-
vers. The purpose of that letter (32) of Giffards which incidentally
shows that the Leicestershire certificate was ready on June 27 was

(30) L.&P. XII (1), 289 (44).
(32) B.& P. X. 1215.
to consult Cromwell as to the suppression. By order of Mr Chancellor and Mr Attorney of the Augmentation they had returned to Catesby, Northamptonshire, where they must begin the suppression and they desired to be assured that their letter was a sufficient warrant. It is interesting as an incident of Tudor methods to consider this letter of Giffard's; that the writ which set the suppression of the smaller monasteries in motion was a letter from the Chancellor and Attorney of the newly-created court: that the agent of the suppression was himself in doubt as to its sufficiency: and that he passed over his own chief and applied for reassurance on that point to his patron, Cromwell. The answer has not survived and no example has been found of a letter or other document authorizing the initiation of the suppression.

The first account was due from the county receivers at Michaelmas, 1536, and was reckoned as running from Michaelmas, 1535. Naturally the system varied somewhat in different parts of the country and the detail of the process of suppression can only be gathered from the study of several examples.

In the case of some of the smaller houses in the north the receiver apparently simply forwarded the account of a bailiff who had been put in charge of the property as a whole. Brodhom, Nottinghamshire, (33) is an example of this. The account which is headed "manerium sive nuper Prioratus" begins with an enumeration of the lands, meadows, pastures, the dovecot, garden and windmill and a list of rents, as in the survey and rental made by the commissioners, including a rent in corn paid by the rectory of Nexelby and the farm paid for the lease of the appropriated rectory of Thorney. There is a note that nothing was received that year from the sale of woods and that no courts were held. The whole amounted to £47.13.2., remarkably higher than the obviously incomplete valuation in the Valor, which gives its gross income as £18.11.10. The bailiff then deducted the amount of some "rents resolute" and an annuity to the vicar of Thorney, his own fee and that of the receiver and of the auditor's clerk and a half-year's rent of the

(33) Augm: Off: Misc: Bks: 286, fo. 23r
- 96 -
site and demesnes which had been leased and the rent paid direct to the receiver. None of this had taken any account of the fact that the priory had been in the occupation of the nuns for a considerable part of the financial year; this was set right by a declaration of the prioress "ex recognitione sua" that she had received the £2 due from Thorney rectory and rents to the value of £10.13.6, and half the revenue of the demesnes was reckoned as having been enjoyed by her for the first half of the year.

The same kind of account was rendered for the lands of Lambley-upon-Tyne (34) by Richard Carnaby, who simplified the account by being bailiff, collector and farmer in his own person. His account opens with a list of demesne lands and rents "prout pat et in libro supervisionis per commissionarios domini Regis capto". The allowance for the nuns' occupation was made by simply halving both demesne revenue and rents, and was followed by some notes headed "Decasus Redditus", a mill in Knaresdale whose rent had not been paid for many years, a tenement in Haltwessel called Redepath "eo quod comburatum per Scotos", a tenement called Nonneburgh "eo quod jacet vastatum" and a tenement in Ranwyk which remained in the hands of the lord by default. His own fee and that of the other bailiff had been already paid by the prioress, so that they had been in her service and were merely transferred by the suppression to that of the Court of Augmentations.

The ordinary form of account may be represented by that presented by the receiver for Warwickshire (35). It opens with a summary account of money received by the receiver from the prioress and bailiff "debita citra actum" with a half-year's value of the demesnes of Henwood, followed by an account of the value of goods to the said bailiff, of a chalice remaining in the keeping of Roger

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(34) Augm: Off: Misc: Bks: 281, fo. 11v
(35) Augm: Off: Misc: Bks, 278, fo. 67 et seqq: not an ordinary Michaelmas account but the first account sent in when the suppression was completed, probably in the spring of 1537.
Wygston, esquire, who had been one of the commissioners, of the superfluous buildings, sold to the bailiff, part of which he had not yet paid, and of two small bells remaining in the priory and not yet sold. A similar account follows for Pinley and Wroxall and the other religious houses in the county. Then comes, for each house in turn, a note that the demesnes for the first half of the year were used by the nuns, besides certain grain growing upon them which had been sold to the profit of the King; then again, for each in turn, a note as to the value of rents and farms, "debita citra actum", which had been paid to the prioress for the support of the nuns. Next are reckoned the expenses of the commissioners which were paid out of the monastic property, £1.15.4. at Henwood, £12.10.5. at Pinley & S. Sepulchre's Warwick, £8.11.11 at Wroxall & £2.1.4. for the survey of Pollesworth which had been granted exemption, and a total of £14.5.0. for the receivers expenses in taking the unsold plate and the documents belonging to the suppressed houses to London; then an account of cattle and grain to the value of £8.16.8. included in the inventory taken on August 14, 1536 at Wroxall and sold for the expenses of the house before the suppression was carried out on February 12, 1537, and of a bell, a sacring-bell, a censer, a pyx, and some other church goods which the commissioners had given to the parishioners of Wroxall "ad ornandum ecclesiam ibidem et ad honorem Dei": and then an account of beasts which had died or been slaughtered between the survey and the dissolution. The receiver paid the wages due at the time of dissolution: to six religious at Henwood, £1.15.4., and to seven servants including a chaplain, £1.16.8., to three religious of Pinley, £1.0.0. and to eight servants including a chaplain, £3.7.0. and to four religious of Wroxall, £4.0.0. and to thirteen servants including three chaplains who had been there at different times that year, £8.3.6. A payment of a small sum of pocket-money, described as "vadia" or "salaria" seems to have been customary in nearly all nunneries. The next entry is headed "Regarda domini Regis" and contains the payment of sums of money to the expelled nuns often to their servants: the exact purpose of it is described in the general instructions as the payment
of their expenses on the way to the Archbishop for their "capacities" elsewhere as intended for the purchase of secular apparell. It was frequently substituted for the payment of the pensions promised to the religious who left their habit by the act for the suppression; in some cases no pensions were paid at all and in a larger number the head of the house alone received one. They were awarded at the time of the dissolution and confirmed by grants under the great seal of the Augmentations. In the Warwickshire receivers' accounts £7 was paid as "regarda" to five nuns of Henwood and 8s 10d to seven servants, £4 to three nuns of Pinley, £6.13.4. to four nuns of Wroxall with 15s to ten servants. This is followed by a note of £44.18.2. paid to the late prioress of Pinley for expenses between the survey and the dissolution upon her oath before the commissioners: £12.7.1. in goods handed over to Roger Wigston in part payment of a debt of £15.6.1. lent by him to the prioress and convent for their expenses in that interval; £5.12.4. paid to the said Roger in part payment of a debt of £13.6.8. for goods bought from him at various times between the 6th year of Henry VIII and the Feast of the Annunciation in the 27th year by the convent of Pinley; and £1.6.0. a free rent due to John Oldenham from Pinley in arrears for eight years. The account concludes with totals for the county for which the receiver accounted as a whole.

The normal form of the accounts is more or less that of the Warwickshire receiver, though small local variations of course appear. Sometimes the site and demesnes had been leased as at Longley; sometimes a permanent bailiff paid the receiver the rents which had not already gone to the support of the convent, as seems to have been the case at Acornbury. Where a small monastery had been granted exemption the account enters the fact as explaining why no account was presented from that house. The whole organization was got into working order with remarkable speed and appears to have been from the first tolerably efficient, and when the surrender of the greater houses began in 1538 the necessary machinery was ready and the officials who worked it experienced. Inevitably however, it afforded scope for peculation. A paper has survived.

bearing fourteen articles accusing the Leicestershire commissioners of various forms of corruption; the exact character of the document is not clear but it may possibly be a draft of a deposition filed in the Court of Augmentations. The articles assert that at the "praying" of the linen and other goods only the receiver and auditor were present, except for the vestments when John Beaumont was present; the commissioners kept two accounts and took horses, cattle and other property to their private use without certifying it and of every man that had a lease they took 6s 8d, at least, which is contrary to law and grieved the poor men sore. The issue of the complaint is not known.

The survey and suppression of the smaller religious houses proceeded during the summer and early autumn of 1536 in almost every county in England. In the southern and south midland counties all the smaller nunneries were suppressed before the close of the year except a few to which grants of exemption were issued during 1537 and in the eastern counties, Hertfordshire, Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk the process was completed by March. From Lincolnshire northward, however, the position was very different. The northern counties contained a very much larger number of very much poorer houses of nuns than the southern counties: there were ten in Lincolnshire and twenty-three in Yorkshire, all below the statutory limit of £200 net income and the nine others scattered over Nottinghamshire, Cheshire, Northumberland, Cumberland and Durham.

(38) L. & P. XIII(2) 840: Augm: Off: Misc: Bks: 478, fo. 32: and see above, p. 119.

(39) In the Receivers' Accounts for Warwickshire occurs the following: (In allocatione) pro expensis G. Gifford equitantis de domo suo in com' Buck' usque Londin' ad consilium domini Regis ad sciendum placitum suum pro dissolutione de Stoneley, S. Sepulcri, Wroxall et Studeley remanentibus non dissolutis per mandatum consillii tempore rebellionis in com' Lincoln'. (Augm: Off: Misc: Bks: 278, fo. 81.) Wroxall was dissolved on February 12, 1537.
also came under the act. The commissioners appointed for Yorkshire were at work in the early days of March, 1536, (40) but the immense amount of detail involved in winding up the affairs of a large number of small and poor corporations made the process of necessity a lengthy one. It was only in part completed when the Pilgrimage of Grace interrupted it in October and the existence of a number of small houses was thus prolonged without exemption until 1538 or later.

The history of the last years of these small northern nunneries would certainly be of remarkable interest if the absence of records did not leave it almost entirely a matter for conjecture. About ten of them are known to have been suppressed before the beginning of the Pilgrimage and grants of exemption were issued to eleven others, mostly during 1537 but one in 1538 and four as late as 1538. Accounts of the Pilgrimage always include a general statement as to the restoration of the expelled religious, both monks and nuns, to their old homes and there seems no reason to question it but direct evidence is only forthcoming with regard to three of the nunneries and in the case of two of these, whose inmates had been granted pensions, the pensions were paid after as before the Pilgrimage so that the nuns cannot have been associated with the rebels in the mind of the government. Nor do the nuns whose convents were not dissolved until 1539 or later appear to have attracted attention or criticism in any case by action taken or attitude assumed during the time of disorder, although it may be noted that no pensions were granted to the inmates of eleven northern houses which survived till after the rebellion without letters of exemption.

The houses which were for a time repopulated by the Pilgrims were Seton in Cumberland, Nunburnholm and S. Clement's by York. A certain Hugh Ascue, who had received a grant of the site and demesnes of Seton, filed a bill (41) in the Court of Augmentations

(40) L. & P. X. 980.
(41) Dugdale, Monasticon, IV. 226.
complaining that "one Thomas Skelton with divers other rebellious persons at the time of the commotion in the north -- entered into the said late priory and put in the late prioress who remained there a quarter of a year at the only charge and cost of your orator -- and his goods did waste and carry away to the value of £23." He asked that letters of privy seal should be issued to the said Thomas to restore the goods or to appear at the Court to answer the charge. A like complaint was filed by William Hyngatt who had paid the King £35.14.11, for a grant of the house and demesnes of Nunburnholme against six persons, one of them the rector of the parish, who had put in again "the late suppressed prioress" and carried away the goods and chattels in the house and upon the demesnes while he was away on the King's service. (42) Less still is known as to the nunnery of S. Clements or Clementhorpe, by York: the abbess tried to legalize her restored position by offering 300 marks to the Queen and £30 to Christopher Askew if he could persuade the Queen to procure the exemption of the house, but the date of her restoration and of the second dissolution of her house are unknown. (43) About them hangs with peculiar closeness the mist which obscures so much of the last days of these houses. The little nunneries had throughout their history been insignificant and the manner of their fall made no exception to that general truth. In the Pilgrimage as in the whole business of the dissolution they were a side issue, implicated unavoidably by their radical connection with the stronger and more important houses of monks.

(42) Notes and Queries, 10th Series, iii, 407.
(43) Dodds, Pilgrimage of Grace, i. 244. L.& P. XI. 879.
PART II.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAST YEARS.
CHAPTER VI.
THE LAST YEARS.

I. The Pause in the suppression, 1537-8.

Hostile and harrassing attitude of the government.

- (i) Archbishop Lee's complaint of usurpation of cure of souls.
- (ii) Prioressa of Dartford accused of keeping a girl against her will.
- (iii) Elstow - the lease of Wilamsted.

Hence attacks by inferior authorities - e.g. the mayor of Oxford on Godstow commons.

Attitude of the nuns towards the government.

II. The dissolutions renewed.

Surrender of greater and exempted houses: machinery - letters to auditors and receivers by Chancellor of the Augmentations, commissions under Privy Seal; the several types of commissions, individual house, county, group of counties. Reappearance of Bough, Layton and other visitors on them: methods, e.g. Romsey, Godstow.

Process of dissolution: Henry VIII's draft letter: deed of surrender. Some refusals to surrender:

Shaftesbury, Amesbury, management of property: example of commissioners accounts (S. Mary's, Winchester.)

Grievance of the abbess of Wilton.

The nuns' pensions: considerations, where any, governing them.

What became of the nuns?
CHAPTER VI.

I.

"The time of the commotion in the north" was followed by a pause in the progress of the dissolutions which divided the history of the fall of the religious houses into two clearly distinct parts. The year 1537 showed a very small number of suppressions; the early months of 1538 almost none. Even in the summer of 1538 the flow of grants of exemption was continued to those small houses in the north whose suppression had been postponed by the disorders; the writ was issued to Nunappleton on July 12. When the final stage in the story of the nunneries was opened in October, 1538, a few small houses were still standing which could be overthrown by the machinery of 1536; all in the northern counties, unless we except the Black Ladies of Brewood, in Staffordshire. The larger houses and those which the King had lately confirmed to the religious and their successors for ever had to be approached by a different way. The government meanwhile maintained towards the religious houses the attitude which it had adopted in 1535. Its behaviour was perfectly consistent in its arbitrary instability. Generally speaking, a perpetual guerilla warfare was carried on against the unfortunate communities; but an occasional act of favour towards one of them encouraged them all to persevere in their labours to secure the goodwill of the Vicar-General. The whole spectacle might almost have been designed to gratify some grim sense of humour in him and nothing displays more clearly the extent of his power than the manner in which the most ordinary rights were solicited of him even by men whose offices had formerly stood among the highest in the country.

The last point may be well illustrated by an incident which took place in the autumn of 1537. The Archbishop of York wrote to the Vicar-General to know his pleasure as to two nunneries in which the office of head of the house was vacant.

(2) L. & P. XIII (1) 1362 (44).
Their position was highly doubtful as they had apparently no grants of exemption and the Archbishop naturally preferred to take no independent action. The Vicar-General sent commissions to each of the houses with authority not merely to exempt them from suppression, but also to hold and confirm the elections of their superiors. Thereupon the Archbishop wrote a highly respectful letter of protest. Confirmation was an act of commission of cure of souls: he had cure of the said houses and should have some say in the election of governors; he begged that he might have oversight of the election and confirmation and if Cromwell "would have anything done in them" he would do his best to satisfy the King and his Vicar-General. It is not known whether his plea for a modicum of regularity produced any effect; as the names of the two houses were not mentioned it is impossible to trace any other evidence concerning them. (3)

Against Dartford in September, 1538, was brought one of those accusations which were then, as they have been since, most popular. The prioress wrote to Cromwell acknowledging his "loving letter" as to Bridget Brownyng, one of her religious company not yet professed. Bridget had been brought by her mother to the late prioress, not at the prioress's desire, nor had she ever been detained but left free to go to her mother which she had always declined to do, "wherefore it may please your good lordship that she may come to your lordship's presence and that the effect of her hert and mynd may be by your good lordship tenderly acceptiond and herd." (4)

A weapon of a more ordinary type was used to harass the nuns of Elstow in February, 1539. Cromwell wrote to them requiring that a lease of their grange and parsonage at Wilmastead should be made to one Mr Holcroft. When the ladies came to look at the indentures, however, they found that the lease included not only the grange and parsonage but also their manor and other lands there. They sealed them nevertheless and confidingly wrote to the

(3) Lee's letter L.& P. XII. (2) 1093.
(4) L.& P. XIII(2), Appendix, 38.
Vicar-General to say they trusted he would see that they took no
hindrance thereby. The incident was only one of many and not
unnaturally the almost undisguised spoliation of the surviving
houses by the government offered an irresistible temptation to
many weaker but not less covetous enemies. At Godstow, for
example, Cromwell, interfered to prevent the mayor and "commonality" of Oxford from entering upon the commons which had belonged,
said the abbess, to her and her tenants for four hundred years.
She sent him her thanks with a couple of Banbury cheeses and a
request that he would delay the commission which the mayor had
demanded until her poor tenants had got in their harvest. This
was in June, 1538; the abbess, whose letters to Cromwell supply
excellent examples of the attitude which the wealthier and more
prudent nunneries were driven to adopt, had already induced him in
the preceding March to accept the office of chief steward of
Godstow. In November the danger drew considerably nearer to
the house and the abbess had occasion to thank Cromwell again for
the "stay" of Dr Landon, who had been there, ready to suppress the
convent against their wills, and to tell him that they had obeyed
his letter "for the preferment of Doctor Owen to owre demaynes
and stocke ... for no man livinge under the kinge
could have had it of hus withe owre good willes
savinge youre lordships. And therefore as my verie
truste and comforde is in you I besseche you to contynewe
my goode lorde as I truste you shall never have cause to
the contraire for your lordeshipe shall be well assured
that there is nother pope nor purgatorie, Image nor
pilgrimage no prayinge to dede saintis usid or regarded
amongest hus but all superstitious ceremonies set apsnte
the verie honor of god and the trewithe of his holie

(5) L.& P. XIV. (1) 325.
(6) L.& P. XIII (1) 1262.
(7) ibid, 441, 492.
wordes as farre as the fraill nature of women maye
ateyne unto it mooste tenderlie folowid and regarded
withe hus not dowtinge but this garmente and facon
of liffe dothe nothinge prevaiile towrdes owre Justify-
ing before god by whome for his sete son Jhesus sake
we onlie truete to be justified and saved Who ever pre
serve yo" honor to his pleasure Amen? (8)

II.

It can have been no surprise to anyone when, after a few
months of this unrestful interval, the final advance upon the re-
ligious houses was begun in full force. Though the act establish-
ing the Court of Augmentations had not clearly endowed the Re-
seivers with power to deal with the lands of monasteries of over
£200 income voluntarily surrendered, the instructions issued to
them ended with a clause to that effect and in August, 1538, the
Chancellor of the Augmentations wrote an instruction, probably
only a sample of many, to the auditor and receiver for Worcestershire,
Herefordshire, Salop and Staffordshire directing their
course in regard to such houses. They were to make a full survey
of lands and other property as had been done in the case of the
smaller houses: to certify what fees, corrodies or other grants
had issued under consent seal; to examine bailiffs' accounts; to
sell bells and superfluous buildings and to make the lead into
sows with the King's mark and deliver them to the constables of
neighbouring castles. (9) In the case of the greater as of the
smaller nunnerie arises a slightly puzzling duality of control in
the business connected with the surrenders. Perhaps the purely
permissive document described above did not suffice to produce the
surrenders with which the Augmentation officials were to deal.

(8) L.& P. XII (2) 911
(9) L.& P. XIII (2) 168
More probably it was intended from the first that it should be supplemented by other machinery. In either case it is certain that the actual surrenders were taken by commissioners appointed for the purpose by the King, and they appear often to have held themselves responsible for returns into the Court of Augmentations of much the same nature as those ordered above. The receivers and auditors were sometimes named among the commissioners for their counties; possibly when they were not named their share in the business was taken for granted.

The composition of these commissions can only be learned from the documents signed on headed with their names as the original warrants have nearly all perished. One which has survived, of February 21, 1539, appointing commissioners for certain houses in Lincolnshire is a warrant under the Privy Seal and it is probable that they were all commissions of that kind. Apparently there was considerable variety in the arrangement of the commissions. In a few cases of important houses it is likely though not certain that a commission was appointed for a single house: thus the pension list for the Minories without Aldgate was signed by Sir Richard Riche and Sir Thomas Pope (chancellor and treasurer of the Augmentations), Sir R. Gresham, Legh and Layton, and that for Sion by Pope, Petre, Francis Cave, John Mores, Thomas Myldemaye and Thomas Spilman. If this is the case, however, it was certainly very exceptional. Sometimes commissions were appointed for single counties, as was probably the case for Oxfordshire, or for certain houses in a given county, as in the warrant mentioned above which appoints commissioners to take the surrenders of a number of houses in Lincolnshire. Probably the most common

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(10) L. & P. XIV (1) 328.
(11) My impression is that none of them occur on the Patent or Close Rolls, but I have not been able to examine the Rolls exhaustively. Cromwell was of course Lord Privy Seal at this time.
(12) L. & P. XIV (1) 680.
(13) L. & P. XIV (2) 581.
method was appointment to take surrenders in a group of counties, thus there was one group of commissioners for the northern counties, Yorkshire, Durham, Northumberland and Cheshire, one for Devon, Somerset and Dorset, one for Hampshire, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire. (14)

A feature of these commissions for the surrender of the greater monasteries was the reappearance in them of the names of Legh, Layton, Ap Rice, Tregonwell and others who had carried out the famous visitation of 1535-6. (15) One at least of them appears on almost every commission whose composition has been ascertained. Moreover they played a part much more important than that fact alone implies. Most of the surrenders were taken before one commissioner or at most two, though in a few cases, generally of the most important houses, a larger number appeared. The natural assumption that the commissioners divided up the large number of houses apportioned to each commission amongst them is not borne out by the fact that the single commissioner was usually one of this notorious little group. The other commissioners were apparently local gentlemen, with the Augmentation Office officials, often the same gentlemen who had served in the suppression of the smaller houses. Perhaps the present business being quite unsupported by statutory authority, was considered particularly suited to the talents and experience of Legh and his fellows, who had not been employed in the comparatively legal and straight-forward matter of suppressing the smaller houses under the Act of 1536. There were incidents in this curious process of extorting voluntary surrenders much more reminiscent of the arbitrary visitation upon

(14) See the lists of names appended to pension-lists of houses in these counties, L. & P. passim. The commission for Hampshire etc., is quoted before the dissolution accounts which survive. Exch: Augm: Off: Misc. Bks. 494, fo. 1.

(15) A complete elucidation of the history and status of these men would perhaps throw a good deal of new light upon the administration of this period.
which they had been successfully sent in 1535 than of anything which had happened since. For example, a certain John Foster was employed by Sir Thomas *Symon* in December, 1538, to investigate the condition of Romsey Abbey. He sent him a description of it with a list of its rents and the names of the abbess and twenty-five nuns. There were plate and jewels worth £300 or more and six bells worth at least £100, and the church was a great sumptuous thing, all freestone and covered with lead. The nuns would be content to do Sir Thomas *Symon* any pleasure but they would be loath to trust to the commissioners' gentleness, hearing that other houses had been straitly handled. (16) A simple case was Dr London's visit to Godstow in November. The abbess wrote to Cromwell on November 5 complaining of his stay there. She said that she owed her preference to Cromwell and that London was against her promotion and had ever since been her mortal enemy. Now he was tarrying there at her great charge and "inveighing" her sisters one by one, apparently to surrender the house. (17) On the following day, November 6, London wrote to Cromwell pleading for the exemption of the house; the abbess had lately paid her first-fruits and many of the nuns were aged and friendless. He adds in a postscript: "This morning my lady holy refereth herself to your lordship's pleasure; wherefore I beseech your lordship of your favourable letters unto her."

On November 16 she thanked Cromwell for checking London's activities there, a good office for which the abbey had paid by leasing their stock and demesnes to one of his protégés. (18)

The process of dissolution of the greater houses was, on the whole, simpler from the point of view of the student than that of the smaller houses. The experiments had now been made and the administrative machinery was in working order and ready to absorb more material. A paper has survived which claims to be a draft of the King's letter with authority to take a surrender (19).

(16) L.& P. XII (2) 1155, from B.M., Royal MS.7.E.XVI. 147.

(17) L.& P. XIII (2) 158; Wright, Letters pp 227 & 229.

(18) L.& P. XIII (2) 611; the last part of his letter has already been quoted.

(19) B.M., Cott. MS. Cleop. E.4, fo. 221, probably a copy.
the document by which the process was initiated. After the usual preliminaries of address and a preamble stating that the monastery in question was "in suche state as the same is neither used to the honour of god nor to the benefite of our Comen weale" it proceeds:—

"we late you wit that therefor beyngynded to take the same into our own hands for a better purpose like as we doubt not but the hedd of the same wolbe contented to make hye surrender accordingly we... do auctorise name assigne and appointe you that immediately reparyng to the said house ye shall receyve of the said hedd suche a writing under the convent seale as to youre discrecions shall same requisite rete and convenent for the due surren­der to of" use of the same..."

They were then to take possession of all the goods of the house and have them "indifferently" sold; to give the head and brethren within a year and a half such share of them as they judged fit: to assign them pensions, pay the debts of the community and "pro­ceede to the Dissolucon of the said house". Plate, jewels and money were to be brought to the Tower and the document ended with a clause directing all mayors, bailiffs and other officers to give the commissioners every assistance in their power. The commissioners or more commonly one of them, generally of the elect number of Cromwell's visitors, went to the house and in most, though not in all cases, received its surrender with little or no delay. Extremely little has survived to indicate the exact means by which this end was attained and it has proved a fruitful subject for controversial hypothesis. The deeds of surrender were in a few cases as st Chateris. (20) signed by the community but more generally they were left unsigned and merely sealed with the convent seal. The ddeeds were generally brief and their

(20) L. & P. XIII (2) 232.
uniformity makes it almost certain that they were drawn up beforehand and only presented to the nuns to be sealed. The surrender was notified by the commission, sometimes to Cromwell direct, sometimes to Sir Richard Riche, chancellor of the Augmentations, which would seem the more logical course, by letter. Occasionally the same letter contained a list of the pensions assigned to the inmates of the house, as did London's letter to Riche upon the surrender of Polesworth (21) although more usually the pensions were notified in a separate list signed by all or a larger number of the commissioners. Indeed no records demonstrate more clearly than those relating to this subject the utterly anarchic and arbitrary fashion in which administration was now carried on, a character which would of course be accentuated by the illegality of the present proceedings. The commissioners, fully conscious that the chancellor of the Augmentations was himself quite as dependent upon the goodwill of the Vicar-General as they were themselves, frequently ignored him and directed their questions and their reports immediately to Cromwell (22).

The summons to surrender was not always received with equal obedience. The abbess of Shaftesbury, the largest nunnery in the country, tried to combine firmness with conciliation and in December, 1538, Arundel wrote to Cromwell that she refused to surrender and moreover offered five hundred marks to the King and £100 to Cromwell if the house might stand. (23) Whether this handsome offer was accepted or not is not known; the house remained for three months more and was surrendered to Tregonwell in March, 1539, the surrender being signed by the abbess. (24) The prioress of Amesbury took at first an even more determined stand. The united force of Tregonwell, Petre and Smyth, fresh from the conquest of Shaftesbury and Wilton, came to Amesbury at the end of March, 1539, but they had to report that they could not bring her

(21) L.& P. XIV (1) 207. For examples of the surrenders see Rymer, XIV, PP. 596-639.
(22) e.g. Legh, L.& P. XII (2) 275 (Chateris); Louden, XIII, (2) 1153 (Delapre).
(23) L.& P. XIII (2) 1092, & V.C.H., Dorset, II, 78.
(24) L.& P. XIV (1) 586.
to any conformity. She said that if the King commanded her to
leave the house she would gladly go though she begged her bread
and she cared for no pension and begged them to trouble her no
further; a letter which perhaps throws a gleam of light for the
imaginative upon the methods by which the surrenders were pro-
cured. But in August when the assault was renewed from a differ-
ent quarter her resistance had weakened. Legh and John Incent
were sent to "move" her to the resignation of her office and she
consented to do so and so made way for the preferment of Crom-
well's"friend" Joan Darroll. More, the fallen prioress, Florence
Bonnewe, wrote to Cromwell saying that she had resigned trusting
the promises which had been made her and begging his intercession
with the King that she might be put in surety of her living. It
is probable that this petition was ignored: her name certainly
does not occur in the pension-list when Joan Darroll and her
ladies surrendered in December.(25)

The deed of surrender of Pollesworth Abbey appointed
two laymen, Ambrose Clark and John Redyng, attorneys to receive
and deliver the property of the house to John London, and Edward
Baskerfylde to the King's use(26) Whether this or some other
was the usual form in which it was carried out, the property of
the surrendered house was taken over by the commissioners. Some-
times they handed it over at once to be farmed, either with or
without a special order. Legh and Candex, commissioners received
orders to prefer Thomas Giffard to the farm of the Black Ladies
of Brewood but one Littleton also claimed it as promised by Crom-
well. The worried commissioners put them both in possession of

(25) L.& P. XIV (1) 626; XIV (2) 26, 37, 646. Dugdale says that
Ashbury was an abbey and enters Joan Darroll as last
abbess. Tregonwell's first letter refers to Florence
Bonnewe as abbess but all the subsequent letters refer
to her and Joan as priorieses.

(26) L.& P. XIV (1) 174.
the revenues of the house (which were entered in the Valor as £11.1.6. a year) and Legh announced his intention of putting his comrade, Mr Candish, in possession of the next house, Lilleshull, and politely begged that he be not supplanted in his absence. (27) London wrote to Cromwell that he had put "Samil, Mr Hennage's kinsman", in possession of Delapre. (28) These lesser favours seem almost always to have been given within a fairly limited circle; Giffard, Candish & Hennage and many other names which arise in such connections were already well known as associated with the suppression of the smaller religious houses. But in many, perhaps in most, cases, the property of the late nunnery was not either farmed out or handed over to a new owner at once, and in such cases it fell to the Receiver of the Court of Augmentations for that district to take over its administration. Meanwhile the immediate business of the actual dissolution was carried out by the commissioners. The summary account sent into the Court of Augmentations by the commissioners for Hampshire, Wiltshire, and Gloucestershire of the dissolution of S. Mary's, Winchester, may be cited as an example. (29) The account opened with a statement of the clear yearly value, £160.6.3. (30) followed by a list of pensions granted to the abbess and convent which amounted in all to £91.13.4 yearly. The records of the community were left in the Treasury there whose keys were handed over to Richard Poulet, esquire, the King's receiver. Then follows a list of the buildings of the abbey, divided into two classes. Those "Assigned to remain":

"the late Abbes' lodging stretching from the church to the frater north and south with offices to the same as Buttre, Pantre, Kicechyn and Larder. The Gatehouse Barne, Bakyng and briwing houses, the Garner next to them, Stables and mills. Committed to the charge and custody of William Lambert to thuse of the King's Majesty."

(27) L. & P. XIII (2) 629.
(28) J888 (2) 1153.
(29) Exch: Augm: Off: Misc: Bks., 494, fo. 11: & see similar accounts for Wherwell & Amesbury, which follow it.
(30) It had been returned for V.E. as £179.7.2.
Deemed to be superfluous:

"the cloistre, chapter house, dormitory, frarter, ffermary, convent kicchyn, two garners on the South side of the Courte, The lodgyng called M. Lanes lodgyng, the priest's lodgyng Committed to the charge and custody as abovesaid!"

This was followed by an estimate of the amount of lead upon the roofs of these buildings and of the weight of the bells; an account as to jowells ("none founden"), plate, given in cunes, and ornaments still reserved in the Commissioners' hands ("none"); and the sum raised by the sale of ornaments and other goods and chattels of the house, £69.15.4, out of which the payments known as "the King's rewards" had been made of fifty shillings each to 22 religious ladies, and arrears of wages and liverys paid to 20 officers and servants, £17.11.11. The debts owing to and by the house had been settled by an agreement with the late abbess, Elizabeth, and her brother, Richard Shelley, who might receive to their own use all debts owing to the abbey and pay all debts owing by it: for which purpose Richard Shelley stood bound in £100. The account concludes with a list of seven churches whose patronage belonged to the abbey.

The dealings of the same commissioners with the abbess of Wilton were the subject of her complaint in a letter to Cromwell, dated March 28, 1539, three days after the surrender of her house. The commissioners had cancelled four leases of lands of the abbey as having been made to her kinsfolk. Two of the leases, she said, had been made long ago to the bearer, her kinsman, as she was without father or brother or any such assured friend. Now the commissioners had assigned "the sayd farme place" for her own residence and the unfortunate kinsman was instructed to await Cromwell's pleasure. Another of the leases had been made to Mr Philip Hobay at the "contemplation" of Cromwell's letters and now he was charged to the King with the whole year's rent, although it was only March and the financial year ran, of course, from Michaelmas to Michaelmas. Moreover the tenants could never pay if they were now prevented from sowing their barley. The abbess

(31)L. & P. XIV(1) 618. -116-
ended by begging that she might not be treated with a more special
malice than other religious houses seeing she had only done what
was lawful and just.

The nuns' pensions were assigned them by the commissioners
at the dissolution but their assignment was not final: they
sent the list to the Chancellor of the Augmentation by whom the
pensions had to be passed before the patent was finally issued to
each nun under the Great Seal of the Augmentations and the nuns
had all to sue in person at the Court before they received them.
Many of the surviving pension-lists are the original lists sent in
by the commissioners and counter-signed by Sir Richard Riche. Only
one case had been noticed in which the pension-list was altered,
that of the Minories, where pensions assigned to a novice and
some lay-sisters were cancelled, but whether by the Chancellor or
by a reconsideration on the part of the commissioners is not cer-
tain. (52) The commissioners did not, however, consider the Chancel-
lor's veto a mere form as they often added special notes explaining
their motive in assigning pensions which might seem high. (33) So
late as July, 1539, Dr Landon wrote, after he had taken the sur-
render of Itford, begging that the pensions might be granted as
the nuns must each be at the charge of coming up to London for
the assurance thereof.

It has already been stated that the number of nunneries
standing at the beginning of 1536 was 124. In the case of 34 of
these houses no pensions were granted at all. In 30 more only the
head of the house was pensioned, the other nuns receiving general-
ly "rewards" out of the profits of the sale of the nunmery goods.
In the remaining 60 cases all or nearly all the members of the
communities received pensions. (34) There seems to have been no
general principle whatever as to which communities were to receive
pensions or as to the value of the pensions where they were award-
ed. The theory that they were determined by the moral condition

(32) L.& P. XIV (1) 680-
(33) e.g. at Delapre, Pollesworth, Godstow, quoted below.
(34) This is a minimum figure; that is, there were possibly a
few more houses to which pensions were awarded; the evi-
dence to the contrary being often entirely negative.

-117-
of the house is not borne out by the evidence of the nunneries. It is certainly true that no pensions were awarded to the nuns of Marham, Crabhouse or Swaffham, whose disorder was fairly well proved, and that relatively high pensions were awarded at Godstow, Pollesworth and S. Mary's, Winchester, which were honourably famous. On the other hand the prioresses of Esholt and Earwood were pensioned although the state of their houses, if they deserved their repute, must have been winked at by their heads and no pensions were awarded at Langley or at Acornbury, whose reputations were excellent, while at Catesby, whose piety and good order had won special letters of intercession even from the visitors of 1535, only the prioress was pensioned. For can it be maintained that the pensions were dependent upon the readiness of the community to surrender; Elizabeth Zouche, abbess of Shaftesbury, who had at first absolutely refused to surrender, received a pension of £133.6.8, the second highest sum awarded to the head of a nunery, and the nuns there received pensions varying from £2.16.8. to £7; and the highest pension £200 was awarded to Agnes Jordan, abbess of Sion, a monastery which had long been suspected of treasonable acts and thoughts but in which even the lay sisters received pensions of £2.13.4. It is possible to trace a general relation between the value of the nunery's property and the amount of the pensions awarded, but only a general relation. This, however, seems to have been the only consideration which exercised much influence. Of the houses to which no pensions were awarded, all, with the possible exception of Romsey, were small, poor and obscure. Eleven of them were among those little nunneries in the northern counties which lingered on without exemption and were finally suppressed, under the Act of 1536, in 1638 or 1639. Nearly all the rest were houses which fell under the Act. The nuns of the

(25) L.& P. XIV (1) 586.

(26) XIV (2) 591; & see Cromwell's Remembrances, L.& P. XIV (2) 426, "the monastery of Syon to come by Praemunire!"
greater houses were held to have some kind of right to a portion of the revenues which they had surrendered, and the fact of having purchased an exemption was generally regarded as a reason for the award of pensions also. For the rest they seem to have been chiefly determined by the disposition of the commissioners. A few examples will best illustrate the considerations which influenced them. The abbess of Delapre, Northampton, was praised for having the house in such good order that its good sufficed to pay its debts; she willingly surrendered to London and Baskerville although she had obtained a grant to continue and they awarded her a pension of £40 because she was sickly and aged and could not long enjoy it. The same commissioners took the surrender of Pollesworth, which, they said, had lately purchased its continuance at great cost and was yet left in perfect financial order. So they gave the abbess a pension of £26.13.4. and with her virtuous reputation and great age they thought she rather deserved more than less. The prioress and another nun there were awarded £3s 4d because they were aged; the other nuns received only 40s; and they begged the chancellor of the Augmentations to satisfy these pensions as most of them were aged, impotent or friendless. Three nuns of Godstow were awarded £3 "because they cannot marry." Three pensions of the nuns were always very much smaller than of the superiors and varied within much narrower limits. The highest sum awarded to a nun who held no office was £8.13.4., awarded to some ladies of Shaftesbury; usually their pensions were from £4 down to £1 and the sums between £1.10. and £3. were much the most common. The pensions of the heads of houses, on the other hand, varied from the £200 assigned to the abbess of Sion and £133.6.8. each to the abbesses of Shaftesbury and Barking down to £2 for the prioress of Kirklees and £1.8.8. for the prioress of Nunmnholm.
The last of the great abbeys to surrender were Godstow and Sion in November and Amesbury in December, 1539. A few small houses in the north remained for a few weeks longer; the surrender of the prioress of Newcastle-upon-Tyne bears date January 3, 1540 (42) and that of S. Mary's, Chester, January 21, (43) and the pension-list of Cokehill, of whose surrender the date is unknown, was drawn up on January 28. (44) With the fall of their houses, the religious ladies for the most part vanish from our view. The mere questions as to which of them were still alive and which had married in 1553, when Cardinal Pole's list was drawn up, can generally receive an answer, but beyond them little is known. In one or two cases, however, fortunate accidents have preserved scraps of information as to their later years. Elizabeth Hothe of Thetford was still drawing her pension in 1553 when she was a hundred years old and was still living a good and catholic woman in the parish of S. James, Norwich. Katherine Newdyck in a will dated at Kirby Moorside in 1541 left bequests "to eight of my sisters that was professed of Wykeham." (47) Another surviving will is that of Christine Burgh, prioress of Nunkeeling, who died in 1566 leaving "one old vassal" to Isabel Bane, gentlewoman, sometime sister of Nunkeeling. (48) The number of ladies who are known to have married is exceedingly small. Of the ladies of Swine it was reported in 1553 that two had married and two others had sold their pensions: "Elizabeth Elseley remayneth with Mr Barton at Northallerton as it is said." (49) The prioress and four nuns of Kirklees were said to have retired together to a house at Chapel Well, Wirfield. The later history of the community of Sion, the premier English nunnery, was summarized by Dugdale (51) and outshines all the rest in interest. The abbey was restored and furnished with an abbess and nuns by Philip and Mary and in the first year of Elizabeth they fled to Holland. They lived at Mechlin.

(42) L.& P. XV, 15r
(43) ibid, 93.
(44) ibid, 110r
(46) V.C.H. Suffolk, ii, 85, from Blomefield, Norfolk, ii, 92.
(47) V.C.H. Yorks, i, 111, 183.
(48) V.C.H. Yorks, i, 111, 120.
(49) V.C.H. Yorks, i, 179.
(50) ibid, 170.
(51) Monasticon, VI,(1),540.
then at Rouen and finally settled in Lisbon. Philip II granted
them five crowns a day and an allowance of wheat. The community
continued to live there until in 1810 they had once more to migrate.
This time they split up and the greater number of them, a party of
nine, returned to England, where two or three of them, very aged,
were still living in 1826. "The last remnant" comments Dugdale "of
an English convent dissolved in the time of Henry VIII."
CONCLUSION.

From the abundance of more or less ambiguous facts and more or less disputable motives which makes up the material for the history of the dissolution, a few points finally emerge plainly in the student's mind.

In the first place, with regard to the nuns themselves and their life. Here we are seriously handicapped by the fact that nearly all our information is derived from the efforts of bishops or others to discover and correct what was wrong. The happy nunnery left but little history behind it. There is no room for doubt that there did exist houses which were well-organized, charitable and earnestly religious, houses which were not merely tolerated but honoured by their neighbours and which probably exercised a very considerable influence. Unfortunately it is about the life of these houses that least is known. On the other hand, there is little room for doubt that the normal type was not that of these houses. Nearly all the nunneries were extremely poor, and, without subscribing entirely to modern standards of comfort and security, it must be admitted that where there is no transforming intellectual and spiritual enthusiasm, the life of a community which lives in constant financial straits tends to become squalid and quarrellsome. That this was the case in many nunneries is proved by the countless squabbles and discontents which emerged at the bishops' visitations. It must always be remembered in considering the life of the nuns how helpless was the individual, unless she were an entirely exceptional person, in the grip of a conventual tradition. Only in very exceptional circumstances was she ever transferred from the house in which she was first professed. When we remember how many of them entered the cloister for secular reasons and how many were probably in some way below the mental or physical standard it is hardly surprising that the poverty and restriction of convent life in its stricter fulfilment was intolerable to them and that they sought relief and excitement, instinctively, in whatever way was open to them. Their
unfulfilled womanhood could find no outlet in intellectual life and was transfigured by no spiritual fervour, and when we remember the social customs and conditions of the time, it would be amazing if the vow of chastity had not proved to some of them intolerable while to others, more numerous, the attraction of furtive meetings and questionable friendships was irresistible. It was not in the nunneries only that spiritual force was sometimes found wanting and the many uses to which the nunneries were put by society, as school, sanctuary, almshouse, refuge, prison, lunatic asylum, would make it veritably miraculous if they had successfully survived the general social wreckage of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. To a small number of able women the nunneries gave an opportunity of work, power and freedom which they could find nowhere else but on the whole setting aside the very small number of houses which made for themselves an honourable fame the picture which has been sketched is not at all too gloomy.

It is worthy of note in passing that in all allusions to conventual bodies at this time there was an extraordinary absence of the conception of corporate existence. The property of a religious house seems to have been very generally regarded as practically the property of the inmates of it at the time. When the prioress of Crabhouse alienated lands for her own profit, dreading the issue of the king's visitation, they were sequestrated by the visitors, but the offence was against the king, who might soon take its property and wished to find it undiminished, not against the monastic corporation whose official the prioress was. Margaret Vernon, the last abbess of Malling, tried to secure from Cromwell that she should enjoy that benefice during her life. It was accepted that the head of a religious house had a far better title to compensation by pension or endowments than the unofficial members of it and they in their turn had a better title in proportion as the property of the house was rich. When we consider the later developments in the spoliation of the Guilds it seems that to one aspect of Henry VIII's policy, as an attack upon corporations and corporate property, justice has not yet been fully done, though the idea has been brought forward by Canon Dixon.
There does not seem to be very much ground for the suggestion that the methods by which the suppression was carried out were the bad old methods of the middle ages. Bad they may have been but there is little that is conspicuously medieval about them. Indeed it is with a shock of surprise that we encounter the warrants for monastic pensions with their traditional formulae. There is much material in the Augmentation office methods and records for that history of Henry VIII's administration, which yet remains to be written and the ways in which the church was governed by Cromwell may well throw considerable light upon the whole subject of sixteenth century government in England. A study so casual and slight as this can only justify one or two comments and suggestions. In the first place, commonplace as the phrase may seem, it may be doubted whether the universal potency of the capable minister and ultimately of the king has ever yet been fully realized. The utter instability of every other existing power in England can only be realized by looking with some care at one of them such as the religious orders. Again the local organization of the surveys and suppressions seems to be of a characteristically Tudor type, looking forward and not backward; and it may be suggested that the class upon which so much of the burden of government was thrown in the sixteenth century is not yet fully understood. That many of the commissioners, like the Justices of the Peace, were drawn from the middle-class country gentlemen is not open to question; but it may be that the line between the class of country gentry and that of the royal officials was not always so clear as is sometimes assumed, and that the same man could not only pass easily from one class to the other but could and did frequently belong to both at the same time. It is one of the venerable platitudes that Tudor despotism manifested itself in a new class of gentry and a new administration as well as in the attacks which every despotism is driven to make upon great men and long-established institutions. Closer study might throw valuable light upon this apparently indisputable truth.

Indeed, the general impression left upon the mind is a sense of how much yet remains to be known, despite all that has been said and written about it, as to the realities of this turning-
point in English history, the reign of Henry VIII. Certainly in his dealings with the monasteries there is much that is yet unexplained. If the religious houses were helpless, it is also true that the government was amazingly inconsistent. Shifts and evasions, promises broken and attitudes altered, do not make up the picture of a true tyrant driving ruthlessly to a goal. To the last there was no suggestion that he was acting upon a principle hostile to the religious life. Such an incident as the new foundation of Bisham Abbey with thirteen monks endowed with lands from other monasteries which they held for less than one year (1538-9) has met with comment but never with explanation. The re-foundations of some of the smaller houses are nearly as strange, though in most cases perhaps they can be explained by the sums of money subscribed to buy their continuance. The details of the sales and grants of confiscated lands might also yield interesting results; general statements as to what was done with them do not seem to have been supported by a thorough study of the records which are available and a mere glance at the elaborate survey and descriptions which had to be supplied by an applicant concerning the lands he desired is enough to cast some doubt upon the common view that they were recklessly granted away. If such doubts should prove to have any justification it would surely affect considerably our theory as to the material basis of the English Reformation.

Such a series of questions and doubts is sorely worthy of the name of a conclusion and yet it is the best that can be offered. Here in uncertainty and scepticism, in dim gleams of new and perhaps fallacious light upon familiar matters, lies the point of union between the subject of this brief essay and the general history of the great events which enfolded it; and however attractive may be the bye-ways of social history, it is in their relation to the larger scheme that their study must seek its fullest justification.
APPENDICES.
APPENDIX I.

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ABBREVIATIONS.

E.H.R. = English Historical Review.
L.& P. = Letters and Papers.
S.R. = Statutes of the Realm.
V.E. = Valor Ecclesiasticus.
P.R.O. = Public Record Office.
B.M. = British Museum.
APPENDIX II.

LIST OF NUNNERIES STANDING IN APRIL, 1636.

Showing order, county, & the number of nuns, & the name of their last head where these are known.

*Houses over £200 a year.  †Houses exempted by patent.

- Arden, Yorks. Benedictine. 7 nuns.
- Armathwaite, Cumberland. Benedictine. 4 nuns.
- Arthington, Yorks. Cluniac. Elizabeth Hall. 10 nuns.
- Basedale, Yorks. Cistercian. 11 nuns.
- Blackborough, Norfolk. Benedictine. 9 nuns.
- Brewood Black Ladies, Staffs. Benedictine. Isabella Launder. 3 nuns.
- Brewood White Ladies, Salop. Cistercian. Margaret Stanneforde. 5 nuns.
- Bristol, S. Mary Magdalene, Gloucestershire. Augustinian canonesses. 2 nuns.
- Brusyard, Suffolk. Fran: Mary Page.
- Burnham, Bucks. Austin canonesses. Alice Baldwen. 9 nuns.
- Campsey, Suffolk. Austin nuns. 18 nuns.
- Canonleigh, Devon. Austin nuns. Elizabeth Fonhill. 17 nuns.
- Carrow, Norfolk. Ben: Cecily Suffield. 7 nuns.
- Catesby, Northants. Cist: Joyce Bekeley. 9 nuns.
- Cheshunt, Herts. Ben: Margery Hill. 2 nuns.
- Chester, S. Mary, Cheshire. Ben: Elizabeth Grosvenor, 10 nuns.
- Dickeshill, Worcester, Cist: Elizabeth Hews. 6 nuns.
Cornworthy, Devon. Austin Nuns. Alicia Dynham?
Crabhouse, Norfolk. * " Margery Studfield. 3 nuns.

*Dartford, Kent. Dom: Joan Vane. 17 nuns.


Easebourne, Sussex. Ben: Margaret Sackville.
Ellerton, Yorks. Cist.


Flamstead, Herts. Ben. Agnes Croke. 7 nuns.

Flixton, Suffolk. Austin nuns.


Goring, Oxon. Austin nuns.

Gokewell, Lincoln. Cist. Anne Castleford. 7 nuns.

Gracedien, Belton, Leicester. Austin nuns. Agnes Litherland. 15 nuns.

Greenfield, Lincoln. Cist. Anne or Agnes Guderyk. 10 nuns.


Hampole, Yorks. Cist. Isabella Arthyngton. 18 nuns.

Handale, Yorks. Ben. Anne Lutton. 9 nuns.


Henwood, Warwick. Ben. Joan or Alice Bigford. 7 nuns.


Holystone ot Halystone, Northumberland. Ben. 6 nuns.


Irvinghoe or Mursley, Bucks. Ben. Margery Hardwicke. 2 nuns.

Keldholme, Yorks. Cist. Elizabeth Lyon. 5 nuns.


Langley, Leicester. Ben. 8 nuns.
Legbourne, Lincoln. Cist. Joan Missenden. 9 nuns.


*Halwell, Ben. Sibilla Nudigate. 13 nuns.


*The Minories. Fran. Elizabeth Salvage. 23 nuns.

Sion. Bridg. Agnes Jordan. 51 nuns.


Walling, Kent. Ben. Margaret Vernon. 11 nuns.

Marham, Norfolk. Cist. 5 nuns.


Molesby or Marton, Yorks. Ben.

Moxby, Yorks. Ben.


Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Northumberland. Agnes Lawson. 8 nuns.


*Nunappleton, Yorks. Cist. Anne Lanketon. 716 nuns.

Nunburnholme, Yorks. Ben. Elizabeth Kylburne. 5 nuns.


*Nunkeeling, Yorks. Ben. Christine Burgh. 11 nuns.

Nunmonkton, Yorks. Ben.

Pinley, Warwick. Ben. Margaret Wigsten. 4 nuns.


Rosedale, Yorks. Cist. 9 nuns.


Seton, Cumberland. Ben.

Sewardsley, Northants. Cist. Elizabeth Campbell. 4 nuns.

Sheppey, Kent. Ben. Alicia Crane. 10 nuns.
Sinningthwaite, Yorks. Cist. Katharine Foster. 9 nuns.
Stixwoold, Lincoln. Cist. Mary Missenden. 11 nuns.
Swine, Yorks. Cist. Dorothy Knight. 19 nuns.
Thicket, Yorks. Ben.
Uak, Monmouth. Ben.
Wilberforce, Yorks. Ben. Elizabeth Lord. 10 nuns.
Wintney, Hants. Cist. 10 nuns.
Wroxall, Warwick. Ben. Agnes Little. 5 nuns.
Yedingham, Yorks. Ben. Agnes Bradirge. 9 nuns.
York, S. Clement. Isabel Warde. 7 nuns.
APPENDIX III.

Note as to Margaret Vernon, Abbess of Malling.

The fortune of history has preserved some letters written by and concerning Margaret Vernon, who was prioress of Little Marlowe in Buckinghamshire and later abbess of Malling. Their illustrative interest may perhaps justify a summary of the story they tell.

In 1529, she was prioress of Little Marlowe, a small and poor nunnery in Buckinghamshire. Already she had established relations of some kind with Cromwell to whom she wrote in that year asking for a loan of £40 until Whitsuntide, to enable her to buy a neighbouring farm; she would repay it at Whitsuntide with malt and wheat and the house should give security under convent seal. Shortly afterwards she wrote again begging to know when he would be in those parts or when she could receive his counsel at his own house and spend the night there. After this gleam of light we see her no more until the fall of the smaller nunneries in 1536.

On June 23, Cavendish wrote to Cromwell reporting the dissolution of Little Marlowe and that the prioress had taken her discharge "like a wise woman" and trusted Cromwell for some reasonable pension; he recommended either that or her promotion to some other house, "for yn my opynyon she is a personage right mete." On January 26, 1537, she wrote to Cromwell herself reminding him that she had trusted to his promises and begging him to help her to some reasonable living, seeing he had ordered her to take nothing away from Little Marlowe but leave the house as wealthy as she could. Sometime in the three months following she was elected abbess of Malling, Kent, in place of Elizabeth Rede who had offended Cromwell in the appointment of her chief steward. In her new and much more

(2) L.& P. Henry VIII, IV, 5971, 5972. (3) X, 1188.
(4) L.& P. VIII, 108, calendared under 1535, which must be wrong.
important office she seems to have become entangled financially with Cromwell again. By some means, probably as the result of a loan, she became indebted to him in March, 1538, to the extent of a hundred marks. As a certain Mr Dormer owed her the same sum she obtained a promise from him to pay it to Cromwell instead. He, however, departed into "hys cuntre" without doing so and the abbess wrote to Cromwell (5) sending him Mr Dormer's bill given to her for the sum "and when yt ys wryttyn on the backyside that I have receyvd therof xx nobles I shall see hym repayd and contented and your lordship to have the hole sum of the hundrethe maros."

He, however, was not, apparently, satisfied with this suggestion, for shortly afterwards she wrote again (6) sending him £20 and asking him to wait for the next until after the next receipt at Lady-day; if he would send back Mr Dormer's bill she would "attempt the law therein"; how urgently he handled her "this symple berer" if Cromwell would hear her, could tell. On April 6, she wrote again (7) she had "perceived by Mr Doctor Lee" that Cromwell was still unsatisfied; she saw that she must trust to herself and begged him to bear with her as she had paid much since her arrival there and as yet had nothing of that half-year's rent. By April 19, the situation had been complicated by evidences of the increasing instability of the monastery's position; she wrote (8) on that day saying that she was surprised to hear that Mr Statbum "made labour" for the house. At the time when she heard that Sir Thomas Nevell was making suit for it she had said that she would rather that Mr Statbum had it than that it should go to another who would not live there, but after she had seen Cromwell she had desired him not to sue for it. She would like to keep the house during her life according to his promise unless all were dissolved. Incidentally, she had broken her day of payment but promised that he should be satisfied within fourteen nights. Later on, she sent £16 and one mark, making up the hundred marks and saying that she had had no answer to her letter written on Easter eve (9). In June, Mistress Statbum visited her and said that Cromwell had commanded her to win the abbess's goodwill for the surrender of her house for which he had

(5) XIII (1), 466. (7) XIII (1), 492. (9) 875
(6) ibid, 468. (8) 898. (10) 1251.