

might be built, and the old chancel might be left as an interesting ruin by the side of it.

Mr. Thompson exhibited a denarius of Antoninus recently found at the Friars, Leicester. He stated that at Medbourne in this county, ancient coins are so frequently turned up in the fields by swine that they have got the name of "pig-money." Mr. Paget mentioned that a coin of Trajan had lately been found in a drain in a field of his at Humberstone.

Mr. Ingram produced a Recovery deed of the thirtieth year of Elizabeth, with a fine impression of one of her seals attached to it.

The chairman suggested that it was very desirable that at future meetings *each member* present should make it a rule to endeavour to exhibit at least *one* object of curiosity or antiquity, rather than for this part of the business of the day to be left optional and uncertain. He also (as secretary) requested that a short account *in writing* might be brought with each object exhibited, in order that the report of the meeting prepared by the secretaries might in this respect be accurate. These suggestions met with the approval of all present.

Mr. Thompson gave the following description of three narrow chambers, one above another, attached to the south side of the tower of the ruined church of Ulverscroft Priory:—

CELLS AT ULVERSCROFT PRIORY.

It seems that the policy of the Roman Catholic Church, with regard to the encouragement of recluses and the adoption of reclusion, was in the earlier ages of its history more of a voluntary character than it has been in later times. Archdeacon Churton informs us* that in the ancient monasteries—such, for example, as those mentioned by patristic authorities—all was self-imposed suffering. Saint John Climacus (who, in the sixth century, was abbot of the monastery founded by the emperor Justinian at the foot of Mount Sinai) speaks of a religious establishment, which he had visited, wherein extreme hardships and great anguish of mind and body were endured by its inmates; the place inhabited by the votaries was called the "house of penitents." They were, however, all from choice inmates of the solitary chambers which they occupied. Ecclesiastical antiquaries show clearly (says the archdeacon) that St. Benedict never contemplated imprisonment for disobedient monks; the words of the rule, like the more ancient Eastern rules, prescribed expulsion. The change from the voluntary system of inclusion and expulsion for disobedience, to compulsory imprisonment, seems to have taken place subsequently to

* "On the Remains of Penitential Cells and Prisons connected with Monastic Houses," a paper in the volume of the Northamptonshire and other Architectural Societies for 1853.

the Norman Conquest, and about the period of the latest revival of monasteries. There were then three different degrees of monastic imprisonment—first, confinement within the walls of the monastery, without permission to go beyond the gate; secondly, confinement within a penitential cell; thirdly, confinement for the refractory within an actual prison.

I may here give a description of the remains of cells at Ulverscroft Priory. Every person who has examined the ruin will remember, that in the south-western angle of the tower is a turret staircase, entered at the foot by a low arched doorway. If the visitor ascends some ten or twelve feet, he will find a doorway opening out of the staircase into an aperture on the south side of the tower. On inspecting this, he will observe that the aperture is about three feet wide, and as long as the side of the tower itself—perhaps twelve or fourteen feet. The outer wall, parallel with the wall of the tower, has decayed and fallen away from the upper part, leaving the remainder only a few feet above ground, but sufficient to show the existence of the original construction. To return to the doorway opening out of the turret staircase; if the visitor look before him, he will observe the inside of a loop-hole, sometimes called a squint. This was evidently intended to allow the inmate of this narrow chamber an opportunity of witnessing the performance of religious worship at the opposite or eastern end of the priory church. Immediately on the left hand of the entrance doorway of this cell is a square opening, piercing quite through the southern wall of the tower into the vacant space below the belfry. For what purpose this was intended, unless for the conveyance of food to the recluse, I cannot say. Immediately below the threshold of the doorway will be seen projecting stones, corresponding to similar fragments at the opposite end of the cell, on which the flooring no doubt originally rested. When the flooring was in existence, the lowest cell must have been in an entirely dark condition, as there are no appearances of openings of any kind in any one of its sides; and it may be inferred that the inmates of this dismal dungeon must have been lowered into it from the middle chamber just described.

The upper story—namely, that above the cell entered from the turret staircase—seems to have occupied, in regard to the extent of its provision for immurement, a position intermediate between what may be called the dark cell on the ground floor, and the second chamber. The uppermost cell has also a “squint,” which permitted its occupant to see the altar; but it had no other opening. It would appear that the tenant of this place must have ascended by a wooden ladder placed in the middle chamber; in fact, it was through this only that access was gained either to the highest or lowest cell.

I have little doubt that the three places in Ulverscroft tower

afforded the means by which the devotees of a past age were enabled or were compelled to become recluses. In the highest, the enthusiast, wrought up to an exalted pitch of fervour, may have consented to self-immurement until death came with his merciful hand to release the victim of superstition from the horrible punishment he must have endured.

Before entering his cell, the sacrament of extreme unction was administered to the anchorite, and the prayer of commendation for his soul was offered, lest, being prevented by death, he should stand in need of those rites of the church. Part of the funeral service was also performed. No entrance was left by which admission into the cell could be obtained after the anchorite was once enclosed; and the bishop who presided at the ceremony sealed the door by which entrance was obtained to this worse than sepulchre*—this grave of the living and mockery of the dead.

My idea of the uppermost chamber is that it was a cell for a recluse who adopted this mode of terminating his own existence.

The intermediate chamber seems to have been more fitted for a person who consented to a temporary reclusion from religious motives, or who may have been imprisoned for a brief space, not exceeding a fortnight; probably for slight violations of monastic discipline.

But what shall be said of the lowest of these once melancholy retreats? We *do* find examples or precedents for the imprisonment in an entirely dark dungeon of refractory monks. The place was known as the "*vade in pace*." The inventor of it (says the archdeacon, on the authority of Peter of Cluny) was one Matthew of Albano, who, finding one bad monk, who could in no other way be reformed, caused a dark cavern to be constructed underground, and shut him therein. Some suppose that it was a place which only admitted light through a grated door above, through which the prisoner descended by a ladder—the same kind of place as that which the chamber we are describing must have been originally.

It was made a subject of complaint about the year 1350 by Stephen, archbishop of Toulouse, that there were certain monks in his province guilty of horrible cruelty towards their brethren who were accused of great sins, casting them into a perpetual prison, dark and gloomy. The king, with the consent of the parliament of Languedoc, at once made an ordinance to mitigate this cruelty. Archdeacon Churton expresses a hope that neither the literal nor the more figurative mode of burying alive was ever practised in this country. I think if he were to visit Ulverscroft Priory, and examine attentively the lowest cell of the three here under notice, he would come to the conclusion that it once formed the grave of

* Ibid.

some living offender against a church which had become equally superstitious and remorseless.

The Chairman, the Rev. J. M. Gresley, read a Paper upon Blackfordby, Leicestershire, its Ecclesiastical History and its Chapel, with extracts from one of the registers, and some account of the Butt-House and of the Joyce family. His description of this picturesque little chapel was illustrated by a series of drawings in water-colour and pencil, by Miss Vavasour and Mrs. Gresley. An abstract of this Paper (with additions) is here given.

BLACKFORDBY, LEICESTERSHIRE.

NEXT to the fact of there being a priest there at the time of William the Conqueror's Survey, in 1081, the earliest mention I find of the church of Ashby de la Zouch is the gift of it to the abbey of Lilleshull in Shropshire.

That abbey of Canons Regular of St. Augustine was founded about 1145, by Richard de Belmeis, the last dean of the collegiate church of St. Alemund in Shrewsbury. He was brother to Philip de Belmeis, lord of the manor of Ashby, who gave to these canons, then just come from Dorchester, "ad fundandam ecclesiam," (inter alia) "the church of St. Elene of Aessevi, with the church of Blacfordbi, to which sixty acres are attached." This grant was subsequently confirmed by Alan la Zouch, husband of Adhelia, daughter and heiress of Philip de Belmeis, whose charter mentions forty acres in Blackfordby, three virgates in Essebi, and a fourth outside the town.* There is land in Blackfordby still known as "The Abbey Lees."

The revenues from Ashby appear to have formed part of the abbat's income, and not to have gone to the common fund of the establishment. In the "Matriculus" of Hugh Wallys or de Welles, bishop of Lincoln, of all the churches in the archdeaconry of Leicester, A.D. 1220, (5 Hen. III.,) it is stated that "The patron of the church of Esseb' is the abbat of Lillishull, who has it of old for his own use. He has also the chapel of Blackfordby, which should be served three days in the week by the mother church. Roger, the vicar, was instituted by H. now of Lincoln."† When the general taxation of England and Wales was made by Pope Nicholas IV., about 1291, the church of Ashby was valued at £20. and the vicarage at £5. The abbat of Lilleshull then possessed *in temporalibus* in the deanery of Akeley £8. 15s. 10d.‡ In 1313,

* Nichols' Leicestershire, West Gosc. Hund. pp. 561, 562. Dugdale's Mon. Ang. vol. vi., p. 263. Eyton's Shropshire, vol. ii., pp. 204-211.

•+ Nichols' Leicestershire, vol. i., p. lviii.

† Taxat. Eccles. P. Nich. IV., pp. 64, 66, 73.