

ON THE NOBLE FAMILY DE BOLEBEC.

*Ignotis errare loois, ignota videre.
Flumina gaudebat, studio minuente laborem.*

OVID, *Met. iv.*, p.294

BY THE LATE REV. J. MARSH.

It has been truly and wisely remarked that that busy rumour which makes us curious to know what others have done or are now doing, and which invites persons of leisure and of taste to search the records of their own and former ages, cannot fail of producing much real and practical improvement. For in pursuit of our inquiries we traverse a vast field of intelligence, producing a variety sufficient to satisfy the most inquisitive curiosity, and worthy of the utmost attention. For through it individually, each one views, as in a glass, the powers of human nature brought into action — it is here that he becomes acquainted with his own origin, and, what is of the greatest consequence to him as a social being, here, from the faults of others he learns to correct his own. No Englishman should rest satisfied without making himself master of the history of his own nation, not merely as a matter of curiosity, but of duty. Thereby he learns the real value of his privileges — while at the same time the example excites in him the manly resolution of handing them down inviolate to posterity. And this, I imagine, will be sufficient to account for our taking a particular desire to become acquainted with what has passed in our own county, and in our own more immediate neighbourhood. It is with this feeling that I have ventured to beg your indulgence and attention to a short notice of the noble family de Bolebec, aware fully that whatever be my defects, in the words of the learned Cambden, "posterity will give every one the honour due to him."

The Manor of Whitchurch was holden in the days of King Edward the Confessor by two brothers, who were

the King's Thaness, who had two manors, with power to sell them. At the Doomsday Survey the Conqueror bestowed Whitchurch on Walter, son of Osborn de Bolebec, surnamed Giffard, a great man among the Normans, under whom it was held by Hugh de Bolebec, his cousin, who was son of Sieur Hugh de Bolebec, a follower of the Norman Duke, to whom he was closely allied by blood, being descended from Aveline, sister of Gunnora, Duchess Dowager of Normandy, and great-grandmother of the Conqueror. This Walter Giffard was one of the assessors of the Survey, and for his zeal and attachment held many manors of the Conqueror — 107 in England, and 48 in Bucks, viz., the Honour of Giffard, at Crendon, which before the Conquest was held by him, as subfeudatory of Seric, son of Alwyn, Chilton, Dorton, Winchendon, Whaddon, Pollicott, Great Horwood, and Newton Longueville, which he held in hand; taxed at 85 hides. He held 213 hides under subfeudatories, viz., Whitchurch, held by Hugh de Bolebec, Hillesden, Edgcott, Ashendon, Lynford, Lavendon, Burston, or Birdstane, &c. &c. He fortified his castles in Normandy in defence of the Conqueror and William Rufus. He was created Earl of Longueville, in Normandy; and, as we find by a charter of Henry I., first Earl of Buckingham in 1070. He joined Robert in opposition to Henry I. He died seised of the Manor of Whitchurch, &c., in 1103, and was buried at Longueville, near Dieppe. He was succeeded by his son, called Earl Walter the younger,* second Earl of Bucks, who remained firm to Henry I., and fought nobly at Brenneville, 1119, against Louis King of France, and Crispin, the famous Norman knight. He was assessed for the marriage of the king's daughter at 94 knights' feet. Notley Abbey was founded by him, † and Ermingard, his Countess, about 1112, being built in the park belonging to his demesnes in Crendon, for Monks of a reformed branch of the Augustine order, from Arras, in France, said by Dugdale, erroneously, to have been the first of this order in England. They were most rigid, wearing no linen, eating no meat, *strictly silent* except at their

* *Vide* "Book of the Abingdon Monastery," built by Cissa, King of West Saxony.

† "Cambden," p. 281.

devotions, which filled up nearly their whole time, and wearing a white tunic. It was dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary de Parco, according to its charter of foundation, for the good of the souls of the founders, of their ancestors, and kindred, and of King Henry II., Queen Eleanor, their issue, ancestors, and successors. The name of Hugh de Bolebec appears as attesting witness to the charter of the foundation, and in another charter for giving the Church of Hillesden to the Abbey. It was also endowed with an estate at Hanney, in Berks, with the Churches and tithes of Hanney, Caversham, Risborough, and the Lord's Wood there, Chilton with Dorton, Ashendon, Hillesden, and many other parishes, with garden, and pasture for 200 sheep, at Crendon, all which gifts were confirmed by the king, and the gift of Maiden Bradley by Walter Giffard was confirmed by the Bishop of Salisbury about 1184. There were many other donations given by the Earls of Pembroke, by Constance, daughter of Hugh de Bolebec, who gave land in Hillesden, and by others. King John gave the patronage and pastoral staff to William Mareschal, Earl of Pembroke, and these privileges were held by his descendants; and by Hugh Mortimer, Earl Marshal, in 1329; by Ralph, Earl of Stafford, and Margaret his wife, heir of Hugh Audley, Earl of Gloucester, in 1372; by Eleanor, wife of Thomas, Duke of Gloucester, in 1399, as heiress of the Bohuns, and then they passed to her heirs. At the time of the dissolution, when Bohun held it, the revenues were £437 6s. 8½d. — Dugdale Mon. Richard Ridge, the last Abbott, had a pension of £100 per annum in lieu of his office. He was appointed in 1532, and died in 1583. The site of the Abbey was granted by Edward VI. to Sir William Paget, Principal Secretary of State, from whom it passed to the families of Butler and Sir John Williams, summoned to Parliament, 1554, as Lord Williams, of Thame; but his patent was never enrolled; and then through the Lentons and Berties, and many unimportant persons to the present possessors. The roof was removed to Chesterton by the Berties, the mullioned windows changed for sashes.

In the apartment suggested by Browne Willis as the Abbot's dining room, 37 feet by 18, is, according to Lipscomb, a mullioned window, opening on the staircase.

On the wainscot is "R. R.," for the last Abbot, and the figure of a crozier. On the cornice, "*Time Deum et recede a malo,*" and "*Principium sapientie est timor Domini.*" The Stafford knot and motto remain in honour of Lord Williams and the Staffords, who had a reserved rent from the Abbey. The arms of the Staffords were in one window in honour of Anne, daughter of Henry Lord Stafford, married to Henry, son of Lord Williams. Walter, second Earl of Buckingham, died without issue, in 1164, and his land escheated to the Crown, and his sister Roscia, or Rohais, married to Richard Fitz Gilbert, Earl of Clare, inherited a portion of the Honour of Giffard, which was further divided by Richard I., among her relations, the Earls of Pembroke and Clare, and by this division Hugh Bolebec, his subfeudatory, obtained the seigniori of the Manor of Whitchurch. In the reign of Henry II., Richard Strongbow,* called the Conqueror of Ireland, "*Comes Strigulioe,*" descended from the sister and heiress of Walter Giffard de Bolebec, gave Tachmelin and other lands in the county of Stafford to Peter Giffard, who had Chillington and the Manor given him, by Peter Corbuchin, in the same reign, which may be proved from a tablet in Crendon Church. The Manor afterwards was divided into three parts. One was granted to All Souls' College for its foundation in 1437. Another to the Mortimers, and from them to the Dormers, and to the Grenvilles, of Wotton, in 1689; and the third to the Bohuns, Earls of Hereford and Essex, created Earl of Northampton by Edward III., 1387, and High Constable of England. The eldest daughter, Eleanor, of the last Humphry de Bohun, married Thomas de Woodstock, youngest son of Edward III., Earl of Buckingham, and created Duke of Gloucester, by Richard II., 1385. The youngest, Mary, married Henry of Lancaster, Earl of Derby, Duke of Hereford, and King of England in 1399. By this Royal alliance Enfield Chase, formerly the property of the Mandevilles, or Magnavils, afterwards of the Bohuns, who succeeded to the Earldom of Essex, became the property of the Duchy of Lancaster, but they retained Kimbolton, or Kinnimantum Castle, the ancient seat of the Mandevilles.

* "Cambden," pp. 529, 996.

Hugh de Bolebec, who succeeded his cousin in the Manor of Whitchurch, was a tenant in capite,* 4th burgher in the county of Buckingham at the Survey, Baron of Headen, in Northumberland, married to a daughter of Lord Mt. Fichet, and held, according to the "Doomsday Book," Rycote, in Oxon, Walton, in Huntingdon, and, in this county, Missenden, famous for its Abbey, founded by the Doyleys, and endowed by the noble family de Missenden upon a vow for escaping shipwreck.† Wadone, famous for its Chase, of which there were the hereditary keepers under the De Burghs, Earls of Ulster, summoned to the Parliament in Dublin in 1295, as the premier nobleman in Ireland, but this office passed to the Pigotts, in 1482, the male branch of the family having failed, Lynford, Wavendon, Medmenham, Brock, Herulfmede, or Hardmead, Cetedone, or Cheddington, Testeham, Culotone, or Calverton, and Elmodesham, with many others. He is traditionally said to have been the founder of Bolebec Castle, in Whitchurch, but though the name implies one of the family to have been so, there is great doubt as to his being the person, as he is also said there to have been the founder of Woburn Abbey, which was certainly not built in his lifetime. From a manuscript in the Ashmolean Collection, he is said to have been an attesting witness to the charter of endowment of Notley Abbey, built by his cousin, Walter Giffard de Bolebec, and his Countess. He left, and was succeeded by his two sons, Hugh and Walter. The former built the Castle in Whitchurch, the site of which is plainly discernible on the left hand of the turnpike road from Aylesbury to Buckingham. In the middle of the village the street makes a flexion from west to south, and forms a communication out of the course of the modern line with the neighbouring parishes of Oving and Pitchcott — the beginning of which is near a spot called "Market Hill" — close to Weir Lane, an entrance to Bolebec Castle, and in which was formerly an old drawbridge, remembered to have been remaining in the time of aged persons living in the last century, and

*"Sir H. Ellis," Introduction and Indexes, p. 78. "Dug. Bar.," vol. i., pp. 451, 452.

† "Cambden," Note to p. 279.

although no vestiges whatever of walls now remain,* as in Cambden's time, a high rampart or bank of earth, with the remains of four or five barrows or tumuli on it, part of the site of the Castle, close to the village, are objects of great curiosity, and are visible at a considerable distance. There are two springs near the site, in the fields called the "Lord's Gardens," similar to those of Quainton and North Marston, which are unaffected by all changes of seasons, never completely frozen in the severest winters, or dried up in the hottest summers, as is the case with other tributary streamlets, and to which the honour has been ascribed of being parent to the Thames. There is a prevalent rumour of a subterranean passage underneath the site of the Castle, communicating with a very old house at the north-east of the village, which even now, though divided into several tenements, is famous for its extensive cellars. From local information it appears that the final demolition of the Castle† was at the end of the civil wars.

This Hugh de Bolebec built Woburn Abbey, in 1145, for Cistercian Monks (from Cisteaux, near Chalons, in Burgundy), to whom he assigned the great tithes of the parish. The Monk of Fountaines, whereof Woburn was a daughter, calling him "*Homo Potens et magnarum rerum inspiratus a domino, ut monasterium construeret ordinis Cisterciensis.*" It adds, "*Venit Fontes (Fountaines) et ad consilium Henrici abbatis viculum quendam Woburniam nomine in Lincolnensi diocesi cum agris adjacentibus consecravit. Suscepit abbas munus de manu divitis, et aedificiis de more constructis, ad locum ipsum fratres, regidares sub abbate Allano destinavit, ad locum qui nunc Woburne nominatur anno incarnationis Dominicoe 1145.*" ‡ He gave to the Abbey, Medmenham, as a cell for it, but this religious house not having been built till his brother Walter had come into possession of the Barony of Bolebec, he is incorrectly, as appears from Dugdale, called its founder.

The charter of this Abbey's foundation runs thus:—
"*Sciatis nos pro amore Dei concessisse, et praesenti*

* Cambden says, "Near this ("Whitchurch) are the remains of Bolebec Castle, said by Grose to be one of the curiosities of Bucks."

† Having been long in a most ruinous state.

‡ "Dugdale's Mon.," pp. 776, 829.

charta nostra confirmasse monaechis ecclesioe Woburnensis, ad construendam abbatiam ordinis Cisterciensis, manerium de Medmenham cum omnibus pertinentiis suis, et libertatibus suis, quod habent ex dono Hugonis de Bolebec." *

Lipscombe says John Talbot was the last Abbot, in 1536, but Browne Willis says that one named Richard, whose surname he could not ascertain, was Abbot in 1521, that Guy Strenshill was the only Monk then, and he supposes him to have been the last. It was valued at £20 6s. 2d. in the 26th year of Henry VIII., and the 29th year of his reign, was made part of the endowment of Bisham, in Berks. A charter of Walter, his brother, in the reign of King Stephen, represents the Abbey of Woburn to have been founded for Monks of the Cistercian order, and that he, in the 2nd year of John, 1201, bestowed on it the Honour of Medmenham, whereof Brock was a hide; and further, that he built the Abbey as a cell, or, as Grose observes more properly, as a daughter to the original foundation of his ancestor, at Woburn, who did not survive the time of Henry II. The Bolebecs, according to "Hearne's Liber Niger Saccarii," had a mansion called "Bullbank's Castle," at Danesfield.

According to Selden ("Cambden," p. 856) the name of Walter de Bolebec appears in an original charter assigning lands to the Church of Winchester; it is sub-signed by many Barons, and among them we have "Signum Walteri de Bolebec." When assessed for the marriage of Maude, King Henry the Second's daughter, he certified his Knights' fees, which he held in capite, to be eight, but under Giffard, Earl of Buckingham, he held 20. He left at his death one daughter, Isabel, nine years old, whose wardship was obtained by Alberic de Vere, Earl of Oxford, descended from the Earls of Guisnes, and called Vere from a place in Zealand, who was offered by Henry II. either of four Earldoms — Dorset, Berks, Wilts, or Oxon — and held the offices of Chamberlain of England, and Portreeve of the City of London, called in the list of the Sheriffs of Bucks and Beds "Alberic de Bolebec." He gave a fine of 500 marks to the King that his son might have Isabel to wife; and again Robert de Vere, 3rd Earl of Oxford, heir of

* "Dugdale's Mon.," v. 684.

his father and brother, who died in 1214, gave the King 200 marks and three palfreys for leave to marry Isabel, and she herself gave 300 marks and three palfreys that she might not be *compelled* to marry, and that she might enjoy what was in arrear of her own and her sister Constance's inheritance, the wife of Elias de Beauchamp. She survived her husband, who died in 1221, and had the custody of the Castles of Caveneles and Hemgeham, more probably Heningham, near Earl's Colne, the burial place of the de Veres, committed to her charge in 1222. She built a convent for Dominicans in Oxford, for which, as Cambden remarks, the University had little to reverence her memory. She afterwards became the wife of Henry de Novent, as it appears that in 1239 Reginald de Valletort, a great man in the west, gave 600 marks to the King for the living of Clifton, Claughton and Bukesham, which Isabel held in dower from her husband, Henry de Novent. In that year also she appointed Peter de Mara to the living of Whitchurch. Her son Hugh, 4th Earl of Oxford, was called Lord Bolebec, having inherited the manor from his mother, and died seised in 1263, and was buried at Earl's Colne, having married Hawisia, daughter of Saier de Quincy, Earl of Winchester, and having in 1248 given 1,000 marks to King Henry III. for the wardship of Alice, daughter and heiress of Gilbert, Earl of Stamford, late Chamberlain to Queen Eleanor, who married Robert, the 5th Earl, who died in 1295. She survived him, and died in 1312. The 6th Earl, Robert, surnamed the Good, died in 1331, and was buried at Earl's Colne, being succeeded by John de Vere, third son of the 5th Earl, who married Maud, sister of Giles, Lord Badlesmore, widow of Robert Fitzpayne, who survived him, and died in 1365. Between the time of his accession, and 1350, the manor was in the hands of trustees, but after his death it descended to the 8th Earl, Thomas, who married Maude, daughter and heiress of Sir Thomas Ufford, Lord Chancellor of England. He died in 1370, and was buried at Colne, but his widow survived till 1413. Robert de Vere, their son, succeeded as 9th Earl, and married first, Lentegronia, a Bohemian Lady, attending on Queen Isabel, and, secondly, Philippa, daughter of Ingelram de Guisnes, Lord de Courci, Earl of Bedford, grand daughter of Edward I., but repudiated. He was

made 1st Marquis of Dublin by Richard II., in the 8th year of his reign, and after that Duke of Ireland, with prerogatives allied to Royalty, which led to the battle of Radford Bridge, in Berks, in 1387, the Duke being defeated by Thomas de Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, and Henry of Lancaster, Earl of Derby, fled to France, and was killed by a boar in 1395, leaving, as Cambden observes (p. 268) nothing but a few gaudy titles to be inscribed on his tomb, the matter of discourse and censure to the world. In 1396, Elizabeth, widow of John, youngest son of the 7th Earl, and brother of Thomas and Aubrey, the 8th and 10th Earls, died seised of the manor and advowson. The first John and his son Aubrey were killed for their attachment to the House of Lancaster, in the 1st year of Edward IV. Aubrey de Vere, uncle, not nephew, of the Duke of Ireland, died on St. George's day, 23rd April, 1400, seised of the manor and advowson — buried at Colne. In 1415 Richard Vere, 11th Earl, died, seised of the manor, as did John de Vere in 1475, and the 13th Earl died seised of Culverton, Whitchurch, &c., in 1514, which continued in the possession of the Veres till, in 1548, Edward, the 17th Earl of Oxford, settled the Honour of Whitchurch on the Duke of Somerset, who had married his daughter. In Queen Elizabeth's reign, the manor passed into the family of Waterhouse, and then to the Watsons and Smiths. Sir Edward Smith, Lord Chief Justice of the Common Pleas in Ireland, was a great benefactor to the parish; he died in 1682, and is buried in the Church. It was sold by his son, in 1695, to the Reynolds, and from them, through the Russells, it has passed to the present possessors, Bolebec site being now the property of the Rhodes's.

In conclusion, I need only adopt the words of an eminent historian, and remark, that I am beholden for the greater part of my information to those excellent gentlemen who, with great cost and persevering industry, have furnished themselves with the choicest facts of the history and antiquity of this county; so that if any one should feel in the least degree profited or delighted by what has been read, let the entire thanks and praise be deservedly given to them and their endeavours.