

**THE HISTORY OF
TAUNTON PRIORY, IN THE
COUNTY OF SOMERSET**

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The History of Taunton Priory, in the County of Somerset by Thomas Hugo

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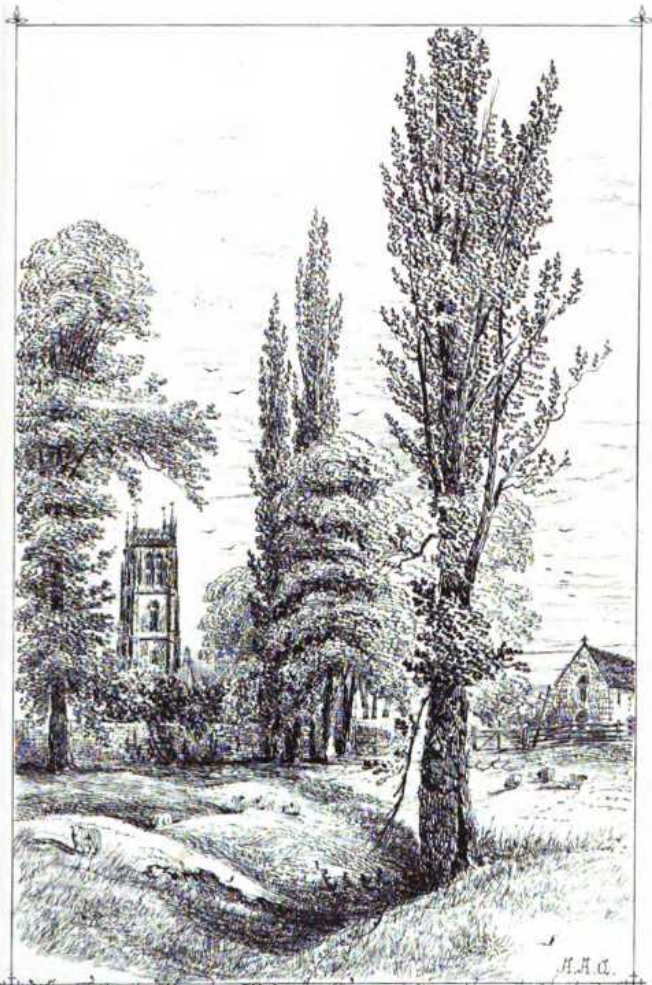
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THOMAS HUGO

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The Site of Hamdon Priory, Somersetshire. From the East.

+ Siantes'erant pedes nostri in atrijs iuris Hierosalem.

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THE
H I S T O R Y
OF
TAUNTON PRIORY,
IN
THE COUNTY OF SOMERSET.

BY
THOMAS HUGO, M.A., F.S.A., F.R.S.L., &c.,

TRUSTEE AND MEMBER OF THE COUNCIL OF THE LONDON AND
MIDDLESEX ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY;
HONORARY FELLOW OF THE ORNITHOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF
GREAT BRITAIN;
HONORARY MEMBER OF THE SOMERSET ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND
NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY;
AND MEMBER OF VARIOUS OTHER LITERARY AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SOCIETIES, BRITISH AND FOREIGN.

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1860.

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P R E F A C E .

I offer the following History of Taunton Priory first to archæological and historical readers in general, and next to the local resident in particular. While the former will thereby possess a new, and I trust not unacceptable, chapter in their collection of Monastic Annals, to the latter it will impart no inconsiderable an acquaintance with the vicissitudes of a place which must needs be associated in his mind with a feeling of sacred interest, and in relation to which very little—and that not of the most accurate kind—has hitherto been offered to his study. He will here observe step by step how for several hundred years his ancient Priory and its learned and saintly Rulers entered into the life of England, how from a single Patron it soon attracted numerous friends and rose to a pre-eminence of power, how it gave a tone to the Society that it directed, and a character to the Region that lay around it, and how at length the day of blasphemy arrived, and irreligion and avarice concluded what piety and liberality had begun.

It is my intention, as it will be seen, to add in the form of an Appendix the originals of the Documents quoted or referred to, almost all of which are unpublished; but, before doing this, I solicit the kindly aid of those who

desire to favour the present attempt, especially by communicating to me such supplementary facts, references, or documents as they may have it in their power to impart. I do not imagine that any material additions to the details which will here be found can be discovered in our national repositories, whose stores I have endeavoured to exhaust; but it is possible that one or more of my local readers may be in possession of some scrap of information—which, how minute soever, will be truly valuable—some ancient deed, or interesting legend, or curious relic of the structure or things connected with it, which he would be willing to have chronicled, and I should be well pleased and most thankful to record.

When the sheets were printed off, it was discovered that a series of Additions and Corrections had been omitted from their intended places in the text. They will be found immediately subsequent to these introductory remarks; and the reader will have no difficulty in perusing them in connection with their context, by attending to the references carefully prefixed to each.

It may probably appear to some of my readers that in the pages which follow, as well as in other of my contributions to historical literature, I have invested the Monastic System and the men who exemplified it with too pleasing a garb, and that I have sketched a portrait in which fancy will luxuriate, rather than one which sober seriousness will accept as true. To this I can only answer that I have represented my facts and my actors as I found them. If I have arrived at a false estimate of their merits, it has assuredly resulted from no want of study, nor from any absence of care. One consideration, however, may explain the reason of the difference observable between the pictures which I have drawn and those of many who

have been pleased to employ upon the same subjects a totally different colouring. I do not attempt to write mediæval history from modern sources or with modern partialities. Rather it is my endeavour to give as faithful a representation of the times which I seek to illustrate, as many years spent among their records, some considerable investigation into their ways and modes of thought, and much willing submission to the labour and attention which such researches necessarily involve, may enable me to offer. I should indeed be unworthy of the position which I have the honour to hold, and of the manifold means which I have the happiness to possess of arriving at and eliciting truth, were I to use such a position and such means for the elevation of any measure or thing which I conscientiously believe to have been evil. At the same time I have offered no opinion, nor have I advanced a question as to how far, or if at all, the Monastic System is applicable to the times in which we live. This would have been altogether foreign to my purpose. I have but endeavoured to exhibit it as it was—not as perfect, for nothing upon earth is so, but marvellously great and inimitably adapted to the ages in which it did its work—and also, with the truthfulness which becomes an historian, to try to disabuse my readers of those false impressions which it has been the too frequent aim of the moderns to create and instil. That such misdirection has in many instances been the result of ignorance as well as malice cannot be denied. Later writers have been content to copy from earlier, without the study of the originals to which they were morally bound to apply themselves; and hence the designedly false portrait which the sixteenth century delineated has been accepted by the nineteenth as a true and faithful likeness. It is high time that the

wrong should be amended. For my own part, I repeat, my first object is the knowledge and promulgation of truth; and, if the discovery of it obliges me to relinquish some favourite opinions, and to surrender some conclusions once accepted as irrefragable, it shall not greatly disturb me, and still less shall it induce me to suppress its declaration and thus do violence to its sacred claim.

T. H.

5, *Finsbury Circus*,
13th *March*, 1860.