

**THE MONASTIC HOUSES
OF ENGLAND, THEIR
ACCUSERS AND
DEFENDERS**

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The monastic houses of England, their accusers and defenders by S. H. B.

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PREFACE.

The following pages may appear abrupt in the commencement; but whilst this can be accounted for by the fact that they have been removed from a more expansive production upon the most important epoch in English history, the materials for which have been growing upon the writer's hands by daily discoveries, it is to be hoped that the present work will at least vindicate its unpretentious title. No impartial reader will perceive any statement made without fair evidence: in fact, if the author may be allowed so to say, there is a philosophic impartiality in using his quotations, except where the now too well known worthlessness of these authorities, as members of the great human family, enforces the

question of the relative credibility of their writings. One great distinctive feature of the book is that none but Protestant authorities are adduced to prove what may be deemed a Catholic postulate; a result, however, which would be inevitable in the hands of any conscientious examiner of the testimonies quoted in this volume.

It was a true and, considering its author, a liberal saying, that the history of England yet remains to be written. But who can do it? A number of consentaneous spirits, bound to strict impartiality, and using the abundant material of the present and hereafter, might accomplish that great national undertaking—no single man ever. We have, to be sure, unwieldy and egotistical treatises, in which a man seems to think he is writing history, whilst he dogmatizes; or relating facts when he is merely recording his own opinions. Such "histories" have we had within the last few years—a page or two of facts in a dozen tomes of arrogant declamation.

Every day is disentombing new evidences of misrepresentation or misconception in the narratives hitherto accepted as English history by the mass of the writers and the people of Great Britain. No epoch has been more misconceived or falsified than that of the Reformation—and no phase of that event more so than the spoliation of the monasteries. To an elucidation of some of the occurrences of that time the compiler of the following pages has directed much attention; and, having laid before him the somewhat quaint notion that he would only use Protestant authorities to prove the wrong and injustice inflicted on the monastic institutions, he has adhered firmly to his intention, and now respectfully leaves the candid reader to judge if the verdict of an entirely Protestant jury is not in favour of the moral and benevolent character of the monasteries and nunneries of old Catholic England.

London, July, 1869.

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CHAPTER I.

LOLD CROMWELL'S REPORT ON THE MONASTIC HOUSES.

It should not be forgotten that, for all the condemnation cast upon the monastic institutions, most historians have no better basis than the report of Thomas Cromwell. The least that can be said is, that writers seeking credence should have searched a purer source for fact. Cromwell was employed to provide a cause for confiscation, although he might have met the foregone conclusions of his master without supplying reasons to satisfy what was called "public conscience." Doubtless, irregularities prevailed in many of those institutions; but it surely was no improvement to break up establishments which acknowledgedly shared their substance with the poor, to confer their revenues upon the worthless nobles and minions of Henry. In the name of common sense, Thomas Cromwell must be a *testis damnosus* for evermore, on a matter like this. It is a rather singular fact, that posterity, which has been so "horrified" at Cromwell's "report," has never seen that document, because the original printed copies were collected and destroyed before King Henry's death; it is supposed, says Henry Griffin, by

Dr. Heath, at the suggestion of King Henry himself. No less than six different versions of the "report" are still extant, all professing to be the original, and all differing in most important details. One of these specimens was printed in Germany, under the inspection of John Poynt,* a circumstance sufficient to attach more than suspicion to the truth of the production, owing to the evil character of its originator or supervisor. Another edition was printed in London by Edward Whitechurch, "revised" by Bale† and Coverdale, a fact which imparts still graver suspicion to the truth of that document. These productions have been long out of print, and copies are extremely scarce; nevertheless, alleged extracts from them have been published in various books. Burnet says he only saw a few leaves of the "original report;" but the remnants he saw, if he can be trusted even so far with having ground upon which to base an assertion, were most probably a portion of a rough copy made by Sir Piers Dutton, which, on his death-bed, he stated to be "most untrue in many particulars."

The MS. in question was in possession of Lord Falkland in the reign of Charles the First, and has been alluded to in a letter of Archbishop Laud. Burnet might possibly have seen this. But the historian has at hand, supplementing all previous

* This "Reformed" prelate was called to penance, and fined at Paul's Cross for taking away, and cohabiting with, the wife of a Nottingham butcher.

† See Maitland's Paper on Bishop Bale, in his "Essays on the Reformation;" Wharton on the character of Bale; also the Parker and Camden Society's papers, on the general merits of this deposed prelate.